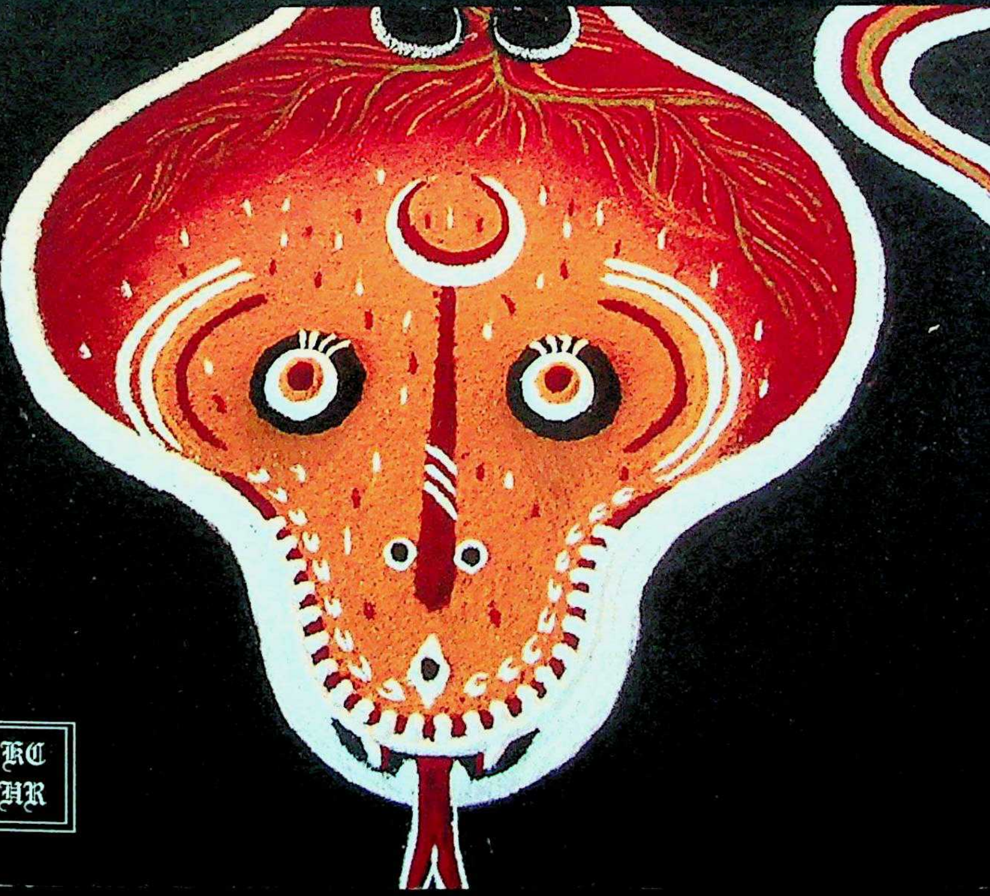
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From Tantric Buddhist antecedents to the configuration of the Brahmanical Pantheon



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LINEAGES OF *KAḶAMEḺUTTŬ* IN KERALA

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Abstract

Kaḷameḻuttŭ has generally been understood as a cultic tradition involving religious symbolism through the drawing of figures or images of major non-Brahmanic deities such as Bhagavati, Ayyappan, Nagam, Cāttan̲, and so forth. This practice entails adhering to specific iconographic prescriptions, using five colours on the ground, and making offerings of seeds, toddy, flesh, blood, and so on, either in *kāvŭ*s or *kōṭṭa*s, or within residential sites. These rituals are accompanied by mantras, ritual songs, and ritual dances in praise of the deities depicted in the *kaḷam*. This study places *kaḷameḻuttŭ* historically as the primary religious symbolism outside the Brahmanical temples in pre-modern Kerala. Additionally, it highlights the active involvement of non-Brahmanical society in these cultic practices of religious symbolism. The central characteristics of *kaḷameḻuttŭ* include the widespread worship of female deities, the prominence attached to female participation, the centrality of ferocious and *maithuna* forms of deities, and the creation of ritual diagrams (i.e., the anthropomorphic images of the deity made with five coloured powders). It is argued that this religious symbolism is fundamentally rooted in the ideological and cultic tradition of Tantric Buddhism of the early medieval period. Subsequently, this Tantric Buddhist religious symbolism merged with Brahmanical religion in medieval Kerala. The study explores sources from Buddhist Tantras and medieval Brahmanical Tantras, medieval inscriptions and literary works, medieval *granthavari*s, manuscripts of *mantravāda*, British colonial records, and contemporary cultic traditions.

LINEAGES OF *KAḶAMEḺUTTŬ* IN KERALA

From Tantric Buddhist Antecedents to the Configuration of the Brahmanical Pantheon

Kerala historical studies have yet to address Buddhism in Kerala due to the prevailing notion of a lack of source materials. Over the past half-a-century, medieval Kerala historians have primarily focused on the establishment of a Brahmanised form of state, economy, society, and religion. Consequently, the historiography of medieval Kerala has predominantly depicted a state governed by the will of the Brahmans, a religion centered around Brahman devotion to Siva and Visnu, and an economy and society controlled by the Brahmanical Saiva-Vaisnava temples. Thus far, medieval inscriptions, extra-temple literature, and other non-Brahmanical-Buddhist documents have only been examined to substantiate the dominance of Brahman-centered institutions in the domains of state, religion, economy, and society. This focus is exemplified in the studies of MGS Narayanan, Kesavan Veluthat and Rajan Gurukkal (Narayanan 1996; Gurukkal 1992; Varier and Gurukkal 2018; Veluthat 2013), whose core arguments contend that there was no religious life in medieval Kerala beyond Brahman bhakti to the deities Siva and Visnu. Existing studies on Buddhism in Kerala have predominantly been interested in looking for monumental architecture such as Buddhist *stūpa*s, mirroring the methodology used in the study of other regions where rich archeological and architectural remains of Buddhist iconography are available. If we stick to this methodology, there is insufficient evidence to suggest the existence of Buddhism in ancient or medieval Kerala. This was the background against which the historians of medieval Kerala put forward the arguments about Saiva-Vaisnava temples based on Brahmanic oligarchy. Their arguments were further strengthened by the fact that empirical sources on Buddhism found in northern and Deccan regions

were not found in Kerala. Consequently, Kerala historiography and Buddhist studies have primarily focused on Buddhist Stupas and Buddhist iconography based on monumental architecture in Kerala.

Medieval Kerala historiography has argued that non-Brahmanical society before the arrival of the Brahmans was nomadic and tribal. This scholarship has posited that the Brahmans were superior and that they civilised non-Brahmanical society out of its nomadic lifestyle (Narayanan 1996: 271; Veluthat 2013: 9, 43-55, 75, 137, 139, 141-142, 27, 31, 32; Gurukkal 2010: 122, 123, 125, 132, 160-163, 173, 174, 176, 179, 197, 250, 251, 292, 306). This study aims to explore whether non-Brahmanical societies had a medieval history beyond the servitude of the Brahmans. It presents observations that refute the Brahman-centred arguments of Narayanan, Veluthat and Gurukkal regarding medieval Kerala. Specifically, this study reveals that Kerala has a strong tradition of Buddhism, which later got converted to Brahmanical religion during the medieval or late medieval period. Sources ranging from *Saṅgam* texts, Buddhist and Brahmanical Tantras, medieval epigraphs, literary works in *Maṇipravāḷam*, medieval *granthavari*s, manuscripts of *mantravāda* rites of the 'lower castes', British colonial records, and contemporary cultic traditions are explored here. The same records used by historians to establish a Brahman-centred or temple-centred society in medieval Kerala are now utilised in this study to trace Buddhism. The lives of non-Brahmans are recorded by the same documents that the above-mentioned scholars studied for establishing their ideas of Brahmanical oligarchy. Below, we will discuss the religious life of non-Brahmans as documented in these medieval records.

I. TANTRIC BUDDHISM IN KERALA

Historians of the medieval Kerala argue that Buddhist architecture did not exist here before the migration of Brahmans. Moreover, they also argue that monumental architecture or temple architecture itself did not exist in Kerala before Brahman migration. Their core argument is that through the construction of Brahman-oriented agamic temples, Brahmans exerted control over the economy, state, and society. They understood the deities of all Saiva-Vaiṣṇava temples near Brahman villages as patron deities under the sovereignty of those villages. These historians have relied on temple inscriptions, but have assumed that the

deities workshipped at these temples today are same as in medival times (Narayanan 1996: 20, 22, 88-90, 149, 161, 162, 208, 213, 219, 220, 262, 269, 272; Gurukkal 1992: 32-83; Varier and Gurukkal 2018: 133, 135, 121-126; Veluthat 2013: 35-85). It is a fact that none of the temples mentioned in the inscriptions from the 9th century have architectural features reflecting the Saiva-Vaiṣṇava iconography of that time. Temples under Brahmanic control were the only structural monuments that have been renovated since the 15th century. Moreover, these medieval historians relied on seventeenth- or eighteenth-century oral tradition rather than material evidence to establish their arguments about Brahmana supremacy over temples. *Kēraḷōtpatti* is the principal oral tradition that has been relied on to write history. Based on these, they have argued that the temples were all Brahmanical in belief, asserting that there was no evidence of Buddhism in Kerala. Since this historical understanding was widely accepted, historical explorations naturally did not target the Buddhist iconography that was available in Kerala.

Any discussion of Buddhism in Kerala usually begins with five Buddhist images found in erstwhile Travancore. If we exclude these five images, believed to be from the 8th-9th centuries, we can conclude that there are no structural remains of Buddhist iconography in Kerala. However, epigraphic and literary evidence of Buddhism abounds in both the ancient and early medieval periods. These references pertain to the Mahayana[1] and Tantric traditions of Buddhism[2] in Kerala. Chinese chronicles speak about esoteric Buddhism in southern India. An example of

1 Mahayana Buddhism seems to have originated in the first century BC or the first century AD within the Śatavāhana empire. At its core, Mahayana revolves around the concept of the existence of Buddhas and Bōdhisattvas as embodying Buddha nature. The Bōdhisattva serves as a role model for one's own spiritual journey (Warder 2013: 164-173).

2 By the 2nd or 4th century, the Mahayana Buddhism had changed to the Tantric Buddhist system. Tantric Buddhism is also known by names like Vajrayanam and Mantrayanam. It first emerged in India. This religion is also popular in countries like Tibet, Nepal, China and Japan. Worship based on mandalas (a mystic circle or symbolic map of the spiritual universe) and mudras (ritual gestures) are distinctive of this religious system. The repeated chanting of mantras (sacred syllables) are also usually used as part of Tantric Buddhism in order to aid meditation (Wayman 1999: 52, 53-58, 62, 63).

this is found in the writings of the 7th-century Chinese traveler I-tsing. Chinese chronicles indicate that Vajrabōdhi, a Tantric Buddhist *ācārya* from the Malaya kingdom in southern India, spread Tantric Buddhism in central India, China and Ceylon (Saroja 1999: 131-133).

Contrary to the arguments of medieval historians, Buddhist literature is available throughout south India. All of these date from the 6th or 7th century onwards, and is intertwined with Tantric Buddhism. Among these, *Gaṇḍavyūha*, *Tarāsukham* and *Maṇimēkhalai* are particularly important (Saroja 1999: 133). The descriptions of south Indian Buddhism by Fa-tsang and Hsuan-tsang in the 7th century and Chin-sheng in the 8th century all revolve around Tantric Buddhism (Devahuti 2001: 120-129; Hikosaka 1989: 180). Together, these works document that Avalōkitēśvara and Tara, the two most significant deities of Tantric Buddhism, are worshipped in the mountain ranges of Kerala. The sacred site in the Western Ghats mentioned in records as worshipped by south Indian societies, including Ceylon, is Potiamala (Potia Mountain). Scholars have determined that this sacred site lies within the Western Ghats (Malaya Mountains), located near Kanyakumari and stretching from Papanasam to Agastya-malai. Tantric Buddhist monks from Ceylon frequently visit this sacred site to worship the deities (Hikosaka 1989: 180, 184, 189).

The *caryas*, *kriyas*, *dīkṣas*, ideology and philosophy of Tantric Buddhism are transmitted to followers through sacred texts. Manuscript forms of these texts are available in countries where Buddhism is popular, including Tibet, Nepal, China and Ceylon. The *Mañjuśrī-mūlakalpa*, an important book among the sacred texts of Tantric Buddhism, has been discovered in southern Kerala, specifically in Maṇalikkara-maṭha in south Travancore (Sastri 1989; Saroja 1999: 134). This Kerala copy is written in the Newari script of Nepal, leading scholars to conclude that this work dates back to the 4th century (Wayman and Tajima 1998:7). The Chinese and Tibetan versions of the *Mañjuśrī-mūlakalpa* also exist today. The circulation of this sacred text in Kerala indicates that the practice of worshiping Bōdhisattva Mañjuśrī was active in southern Kerala.

Bhagavaddajjukam, a Sanskrit play believed to have been written before the 7th century, provides a clear indication of the existence of Mahayana Buddhism in Kerala. The play narrates the story of a Brahmana

comedian who converts from Mahayana Buddhism to the Brahmanical religion (Narayanan 1996: 338). Scholars have noted the presence of old Malayalam sentences (which are Prakrit imitations) in the work. Additionally, references to Buddhist works such as *Prajñāpāramitā*, *Pañcarakṣa*, *Tathāgataguhya*, as well as Tantric Buddhist offerings like *arikkibali* and *ujiṣṭabali* are evident in the play (ibid: 339). This demonstrates the widespread popularity of Mahayana Buddhism in Kerala.

We had refered earlier to the Buddha images found in the Alappuzha-Kottayam region of erstwhile Travancore. Historical records, comprising epigraphical and literary evidence, confirm the existence of a Mahayana Buddhist *vihāra* near this region. A 9th-century document attributed to the Āy king Vikramāditya Varaguṇa makes reference to the Mahayana Buddhist *vihāra* in Srimulavasam, and contains hymns praising Śaudhodani (the son of Śudhodana, i.e., the Buddha), Avalōkitēśvara and *dharmasaṅgha* (ibid: 475; Rao 1988: 275-287). Scholars, including MGS Narayanan, speculate that Srimulavasam was situated near the area of Trikkunnappuzha in the Alappuzha-Kottayam region. They note the presence of a village of the same name where Buddha statues had been discovered. . Additionally, historical indications suggest that a representative from Trikkunnappuzha attended the Perumal's council in medieval times (Narayanan 1996: 338).[3] The 11th-century *Mūṣakavaṁśakāvya* also emphasises the significance of the sacred site of Srimulavasam. The poem testifies to Musaka king Vikrama Rama's (c. 929 AD) efforts to protect the site from sea attacks (Unni 1980: 72). Furthermore, documents of the Chera king Vijayaraghava indicate that the temple's guardianship was entrusted to Prince Vira Kota. Despite the eventual submersion of the buildings, the temple flourished from the 9th to the 11th century (Narayanan 1996: 181). While the precise correlation between Srimulavasam and the location of the Buddhist statues remains debatable, the most significant findings from these temple records and

3 MGS suggests that it could have been a representative of Srimulavasam of Trikkunnappuzha who participated in the council of Chera state. MGS made this comment to support his assumption that Srimulavasam was situated in Trikkunnappuzha (Narayanan 1996: 338). "Kulacekara koyilatikarikal... nalutaliyeyum tirukkunrapolaiyum kutti kontu netiya tali irunnaruli..." See Perunna Inscription (1102 AD) (*Ibid*: 355)

literary works is the about the existence of a significant Tantric Buddhist sacred site on the Kerala coast that was patronised by medieval kings.

In *Mūṣakavaṁśakāvya*, there are indications of Buddhism that extend beyond the sacred site Srimulavasam. It is very interesting to note that the names of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas appear in the list of the rulers of Musaka clan, such as Vajradhāra, Acala, Vairōcana, Vairōcana II, Vajrasara, and Akṣōbhya (Unni 1980: 62-64). A statue of Vajradhāra, bearing Tantric Buddhist insignia, and identified as the Buddha, has been discovered in Sri Lanka. (Deegalle 1999: 349-351). The prefix '*vajra*' itself suggests its Mahayana Tantric Buddhist origin. There are references to drawing images of Vajradhāras in Buddhist *maṇḍalas*. *Vairōcanābhisaṁbhodhi-tantra* says that four Vajradhāras are drawn at the four corners of *maṇḍalas* (Wayman, 1998: 91). Vairōcanan, Akṣōbhyan and Acalan are all recognised as bodhisattvas (Bhattacharya 1958: 53-54). Additionally, *Mūṣakavaṁśakāvya* mentions a Musaka king named Rājavarman who constructed a Buddhist temple named 'Rājavihāra' where Buddhist monks propagated the three jewels. As depicted in Buddhism, the 'three jewels' signifies the three teachings of *Buddha*, *Dharma* and *Saṅgha*.

Evidence of Mahayana and its tantric tradition in Kerala can also be found in contexts beyond the documents mentioned above. An example of this is the Nedumpuram Tali temple record. The record indicates that payments are made to temple employees referred to as *kāntarpikar* (Narayanan 1996: 193). These are the instrumental musicians of the temple. It is noteworthy that the term '*kāntarpikar*' literally translates to 'the people of *kāmadēva*' (Gurukkal 1992: 56). The term is derived from the Sanskrit '*gāndharvika*'. Numerous references to *gāndharvika* as musicians can be found in Buddhist sources such as the inscriptions of the Sanchi or Bharhut *stūpas*. These musicians are mentioned as praising the Buddha, and chanting the *sūtras*.

Indications of Mahayana are evident in other inscriptions in Kerala too. Many references found in Buddhist inscriptions of Sri Lanka are also mirrored in Kerala. The prime illustration of this is the mention of *lōkapperuṁceṭṭi* in the Viraraghava copper plate. The Viraraghava copper plate (13th century) records the occasion when king Viraraghava bestowed the title of '*maṇigrāma*' upon a merchant named Iravi Kort-

tanan who is also known as *lōkapperumceṭṭi* (Hultzsch 1896-7: 292, 293, 295-296). We also see that there is a Buddhist deity in Sri Lanka called *Lōkapperumceṭṭiyār*. In Tantric Buddhism, *Lōkapperumceṭṭiyār* represents the Buddha or a Bodhisattva. The *paḷḷi* [4] of the *Aññūṟṟuvar* is the sacred site of *Lōkapperumceṭṭiyār* in Sri Lanka. It is decribed in the *Erivīrapaṭṭiṉam* inscription (c. 1150 AD) (Subbarayalu 2012: 191, 205).[5] The *Aññūṟṟuvar* are familiar to Kerala. In medieval records, we find mentions of *nūṟṟuvar* organizations consisting of *Aññūṟṟuvar*. The Tirunelli inscription mentions *Aññūṟṟuvar*: the gift of land to the temple is placed under their protection (Narayanan 1996: A 36).[6] Anyway, *Vāriyar*s and *Aññūṟṟuvar* are among the traders or temple communities associated with Buddhism in Sri Lankan inscriptions (Subbarayalu 2012: 191, 203, 205). The Viraraghava copper plate revolves around trade, is similar to Sri Lankan Buddhist inscriptions. If a trader in Kerala bears the name of a Bodhisattva, that trader must have some connection to Tantric Buddhism. The inscriptions in Sri Lanka also document grants from merchants.

There are also various references to Tantric Buddhism in Chera inscriptions. One such example is the mention of *Cākyan*. *Cākyār*s were actors who performed Sanskrit plays or puranic stories in *kūttŭ* and *kūtiyāṭṭam* (Narayanan 1996: 413). The Kollur Madham copper plates mention the land of *Cākyār*s (*Cākyāmār virutti*) (ibid: B 15). Records of Trikkadittanam (ibid: A 32), Kollam Rameswaram (ibid: A 71) and

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4 A non-*Vedic* shrine is referred to as a paḷḷi. This term was formerly applied to Jain, Buddhist, Christian or Muslim religious centre. In this context, we have used the term to denote a Buddhist shrine.

5 Erivīra-paṭṭiṉam, a medieval town in Tamil Nadu, was founded by merchants who settled there as private armies. The donations they gave to temples are recorded in these Erivīrapaṭṭinam inscriptions. Most of these inscriptions date back to the 11th and 12th centuries (Ray: 15).

6 In fact, the *nūṟṟuvar* organizations that comprise the *Aññūṟṟuvar* are all merchant associations. These merchant associations dominated economic transactions in peninsular India. Not only did they develop powerful economic networks, but they also employed private armies. They donated regularly to medieval temples from the 9th to the mid-14th centuries (Narayanan 1996: 36). As part of that tradition, they protected temple donations in medieval Kerala.

Tiruvalla (ibid: A 80) refer to the performance of *kūttŭ* in the temple. This evidence shows that the enactment of Sanskrit palys by *Cākyārs* had become quite popular in medieval Kerala temples (ibid: 351). Cola inscriptions also mention the storytelling and acting tradition of *Cākyārs* in medieval south India. *Cilappatikāram* also refers to *Cākyaṉ* as *kūttaccākyaṉ* (dancer/actor *Cākyaṉ*). It is very important to note that in the early medieval period, the Buddhists were known as *Cākyars*. But in temple inscriptions, the *Cākyārs* have no performances related to Buddhism. All the medieval temple documents available to date are from the time of Brahmanisation. This is why we are unable to find anything connecting the *Cākyārs* and Buddhism in those inscriptions. Anyway, the *Cākyaṉ* found in early medieval period is associated with the Buddhism. In the Tevaram hymns, we find Buddhists being referred to as *Cākkyar* (Saroja 1998: 12). The Buddha monk *Cākyaṉ* is also mentioned in the *Periyapurāṇam* (Balambal 1998: 34, 37; Champakalakshmi 1998: 90). The term '*cākyaṉ*' represents the Sākyamuni Buddha. Numerous Buddhist inscriptions refer to grants made to 'Sākya-bhikṣu'. For example, a significant portion of the Ajanta inscriptions record this (Cohen 2006: 280-283, 291-304). 'Sākyamuni' signifies the sage of the *Śākyas*. For example, a significant portion of the Ajanta inscriptions record this (Cohen 2006: 280-283, 291-304). 'Sakyamuni' signifies the sage of the *Śākyas*, this being the clan name of the Buddha, whose family ruled over Kapilavastu. The image of Sakyamuni Buddha is painted and worshipped in mandalas, just like with Vairōcana, Avalōkitēśvara and other Buddhas. In Vairōcana's mandalas, Sakyamuni Buddha holds the second position. In addition to the Sakyamuni, Buddha is also placed in mandalas (Wayman and Tajima 1998: 88-90). Here, we also see the Sakyamuni serving as the *nirmāṇakāya* of Buddha.

Nirmāṇakāya refers to the physical manifestation of Buddha. In other words, Sakyamuni is the physical manifestation of Buddha that devotees can see. It is this Sakyamuni who speaks to sentient beings about Buddha's Dharma doctrines. He teaches these Dharma doctrines across all the mundane realms extended in space, being given the role of explaining them (ibid: 88-90, 93, 96, 103, 106, 218, 249). There are indications from Buddhist sources that *Cākyārs* explaining Dharmas doctrines in kūttŭ. Explanations of Puranas performed by Cākyārs might mark the period when temples became integrated into the process of brahmanisa-

tion.[7] Some linguists had already observed that Manipravala works was often used to accompany kūttŭ performances. The language in which Manipravala works are written is a Buddhist hybrid Sanskrit (Sanskrit mixed with Prakrit). Mahayana *sūtra*s are also composed in the same language. These will be further elucidated below during the discussion of the history of *mantra*s. The Prakrit language holds great importance in *kūttŭ* and *kūṭiyāṭṭam*. *Cākyār*s make characters like Surpanaka speak varieties of Malayalam fabricated in imitation of the Prakrit languages (Nair 1995: 118, 120, 121, 168, 169). Nonetheless, there is no doubt that the *Cākyan̲* found in both Chera as well as Buddhist inscriptions are one and the same. Exploring how this *Cākyan̲*, a physical manifestation of the Buddha seen in Buddhist countries, became a propagator of puranic religion is worth studying.

Just as Kerala is marked in Chinese documents, there are references to Kerala Buddhist practices in Tibetan documents. *Cakrasaṁvara-tantra*, a Buddhist tantra said to have been written in the 6th century, records that twenty-one thousand Tantric Buddhist *yōgini*s were born in Western Ghats. The text further says that these *yōgini*s were born in a *Caṇḍāla* family at Pulliramalaya and Kanakagiri in Western Ghats. The *Cakrasaṁvara-tantra* is a Buddhist tantra that was practiced both in India and Tibet. There is a place named Kanakagiri in the Chamarajanagar district, near Mysore in Karnataka, where a Jain sacred site of the same name is located. Scholars identify Pulliramalaya as located in south India, very close to the fabled Buddhist pilgrimage site of Potalaka (Gray 2007a: 333). The same indications can see in the *Kēraḷōtpatti Granthavari*, which says that Harischandra Perumal (who is believed to be the founder of Kottayam kingdom of *Pur̲akil̲ārnāṭŭ* (Raja 2010: 30) con-

7 "Puyteri karumpin vitukalai tamaraipu
Pumpotucitai vilntenakkutter
atukalankatukkumanattaiye..."
see *Pur̲anānur̲ŭ*, pāttu 28 (Pilla 1997: 48)

Kūttŭ existed in ancient Tamilakam even before the Puranas were performed in temples, and it was not originally a part of Puranic tradition. Dancers like Madhavi performed *kūttŭ* in Tamilakam, and over the time, these performances have also begun to be Brahmanised. For more about *kūttŭ*, see Ganesh 2009: 182; Nair 1989: 80-85.

structed a *kōṭṭa*[8] at Puralimala (which is Kannur district of Kerala, and very near to Kanakagiri of Karnataka) and that it is a place of *vanadēvatas* and such cultic practices (Gundert 1868: 32).

James Mallinson's recent study is highly significant in the discussion of Buddhism in Kerala. The study focuses on Mangalore, a region very close to present-day Kerala and which was once part of Kerala itself. Mallinson's research sheds light on the history of northern Kerala. His study argues that the Konkan region, particularly the Kadri monastery in Mangalore, served as a center of Vajrayana Buddhism. Utilising textual, epigraphic, and material sources spanning from the 6th to the 17th century, Mallinson contends that the Konkan regions worshipped Vajrayana deities such as Buddha, Tārā Bhagavatī, Mañjughoṣa, Acala, Akṣōbhya, Avalōkitēśvara, and Amitābha (Mallinson 2019). Furthermore, Mallinson argues that the Saiva Nath traditions appropriated these Vajrayana Buddhist traditions and images, incorporating them into the Kadri monastery's worship as a Brahmanic pantheon of Brahmā, Visnu, and Vyāsan (ibid.). He suggests that the Kadri monastery functioned as a Vajrayana center until the 17th century when the northern Nath lineage claimed Kadri, recognising it as the southern seat of the four seats of the Nath *saṁpradāya*. Mallinson's observations highlight that following Brahmanical appropriation in the 17th century, the followers of the Vajrayana lineage in Kadri migrated to northern Kerala. He asserts that Yogi ascetics who had adhered to the Vajrayana lineage migrated to northern Kerala in the 17th century when Kadri underwent Brahmanisation. This migration is documented in the Teyyam performances by the *Cōyī* (the vernacular for Yogi) caste in northern Kerala (Freeman 2006: 167–69), who today worship Yogi Bhairavan. Mallinson's study suggests that non-Brahmanical practices, such as Teyyam, are associated with Tantric Buddhism. This observation adds significant new dimensions and insights to Kerala historical studies.

Kadri, which served as the Vajrayana center until the 17th century, was situated on the northern border region of Kerala. Kadri and the Mu-

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8 **Kōṭṭas** were sacred sites where non-Brahmanical deities were worshipped. The *kōṭṭa* believed to have been created by Harischandra Perumal is known as Harischandra *kōṭṭa*. According to the *Kēraḷōtpatti*, Harischandra Perumal visited that *kōṭṭa* and he never returned (Gundert 1868: 32).

saka country of Ezhimala are geographically very close, with Ezhimala often considered a geographical extension of Kadri in Konkan region. During the early medieval period, these regions frequently formed part of a unified state.[9] It should be understood that the Tantric Buddhist tradition present in Konkan and Kadri is also evident in Musaka country. It has been observed above that the *vaṁśakāvya* of Ezhimala is replete with references to Mahayana Buddhism. The Yogi Bhairavan worship mentioned above is also practiced in *kaḷameḻuttŭ* in northern Kerala. Vairocana, the Bodhisattva mentioned in *Mūṣakavaṃśakāvya*, is worshipped in *kaḷameḻuttŭ* as well as Teyyam in north Kerala. Tantric Buddhism and its rituals are the focal points of our study, and they will be discussed in detail below.

We have now examined the epigraphical, literary, and material (in the case of Kadri) evidence of Tantric Buddhism that existed in Kerala until the early medieval period. During this era, Nagappattinam, Kaverippumpattinam and Kanchi emerged as crucial centers of Tantric Buddhism in south India (Hikosaka 1989: 159). Kerala maintained exceptionally close trade relations with these Tantric Buddhist sacred centers, as well as with Sri Lanka and other Buddhist countries in south-eastern Asia (Ray 1998: 8, 16-17). The trade routes connecting Nagappattinam, Kaverippumpattinam, and Kanchi through the Palghat gap to Kodungallur were highly active during the early medieval period (Champakalakshmi: 47, 331, 326). Until recently, Kerala also had trade relations with China. We have observed the pilgrimage of Ceylon monks to Potiamala in Kerala and the prominence of Buddhism in Kerala as documented in Tibetan, Chinese and Nepali works. Tantric Buddhism's presence in Kerala is marked in the extensive network of Buddhism elsewhere in Asia. Recent material evidence from the Pattanam excavation in Kerala further validates this argument. Temple records also attest to the acceptance of traders from Ceylon and other foreign traders in Kerala. Medieval Manipravala literature mentions trade products from Bengal (Pilla 1962b: 158).[10] During the early modern period, Bengal followed

9 A 6th-century inscription also claims Ezhimala was under Chalukya rule, as documented by Chalukya King Kirtivarmman I (AD 566-598) (Narayanan, Veluthat 1986: 258).

10 A Manipravala text called *Candrōtsavam* mentions a "perfume" from Bengal

the Mahayana and Tantric schools of Buddhism (Wayman 1999: ix, x). The history of these vast networks of religion and trade reveals the movement of Buddhists from Kerala to other parts of South India, Sri Lanka, China, Tibet, and the journey of monks to Kerala. This history is illuminated through epigraphical and literary evidence from the beginning of the medieval period.

We have explored the extensive network of religion in early medieval Kerala, which encompassed the worship of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in the Western Ghats and coasts of Kerala, as well as the movement of Buddhist ascetics in and out of the region. However, the rich Buddhist tradition documented in literary works, epigraphical evidence, notes of foreign traders, and material findings from Pattanam is notably absent in the temple iconography of medieval Kerala. This suggests that there have been Brahmanical appropriations in the structural temples we see today. It is striking that the majority of temple inscriptions were discovered from Saiva temples of 19th-century Kerala. Interestingly, the majority of these temples lack early medieval Saiva iconography and instead they maintain *svayaṁbhū* or 'self-born' *liṅgas*. James Mallinson has observed that the idol of Manjunatha in the central shrine at Kadri was replaced by a *svayaṁbhū liṅga* representing Siva. We have noted earlier how Buddhas and Bodhisattvas were transformed into Vyasa, Brahma, and Visnu in Kadri. There are compelling reasons to speculate that remnants of iconographic features were disposed of into ponds, wells, rivers, and the sea by the Brahmanical religion. It is common in Kerala for Buddhist and Jain iconographical remnants to emerge from ponds, wells, and rivers. Rituals such as masking, veiling, and garlanding of statues are prevalent methods of Brahmanisation today, aimed at erasing or concealing Jain-Buddhist marks. It is known that a significant number of temples were brahmanised through renovation.[11]

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in connection with a medieval dancer named Māracēmanti, which is Elamkulam's interpretation. However, according to the scholar Athiriyezhath Neelakantan Bhattathiripad, it is a jar from Bengal (Bhattathiripad 2017: 250). See *Candrōtsavam*, "manamiḷakinavankāḷattucavvātanēkam...", Part IV, Ślōka 82

11 Scholars observe that the Arya Brahmans modified the medieval temples of Kerala in Pallava-Chola style (Narayanan 1996: 372). This process known

Therefore, establishing the material evidence of Buddhist iconography in the sacred sites of Kerala is a challenging task. It is reasonable to assume that the process of Brahmanising temples by destroying inscriptions and replacing iconographies continued from the medieval period onwards. Temple inscriptions and structural temples have been Brahmanised in this manner. Historians have been writing the medieval history of Kerala based solely on Brahmanised sources. Consequently, it is natural for medieval historiography to align closely with Brahmana interests.[12]

An examination of the religious practices of non-Brahmanical societies outside the realm of Brahmanaised structural temples reveals a close connection to Tantric Buddhism. The religious practices, deities, ideologies, and philosophies of Tantric Buddhism, which are evident in medieval sources but absent in structural temples, are observed to persist in the religious practices of non-Brahmanical societies. Despite under-

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as Brahmanisation. Historians, including George Mechell, suggest that the earliest temples in Kerala were late medieval structures constructed from the 16th century onwards. (Michell 2015: 278-288). P Shanmugam also notes that temples in medieval south India were constructed on the foundations of earlier temples (Shanmugam 2014: 101). It can therefore be concluded that the medieval temples of Kerala are a result of Brahmanisation, which modified as part of the Saiva-Vaisnava devotion.

12 For the past three centuries, the medieval history of Kerala has been constructed around the brahmanical legend of the *Keralotpatti* texts. This approach to historiography was initiated by colonial officials, who developed a methodology centered on brahmanical legends. Subsequent south Indian historians, including KA Nilakanta Sastri, adopted this approach. MGS Narayanan, who later restructured medieval Kerala history, along with his successors Kesavan Veluthat, Raghava Varier, and Rajan Gurukkal, wrote a medieval history of Kerala based on the *Keralotpatti*. These historians utilized historical documents to validate the 32 Brahman villages referenced in the text, interpreting Kerala's entire historical record as a means to legitimize Brahmanical legends. They asserted that Brahmanical myths constituted the history of Kerala and that Kerala's distinct identity—including its state, paddy economy, advanced social systems, monumental architecture (including temples), and language—was fundamentally shaped by Brahmanical contributions. As a result, for three centuries, the medieval history of Kerala was written primarily to serve the interests of the Brahmans (Shibi 2024: 9-81).

going Brahmanisation in various ways, when we delve into the history and essence of worship, we can discern that the religious framework of Tantric Buddhism continues to influence these practices even today. The religious world of *kaḷameḻuttu*, serves as a prime example of this phenomenon. The nature of rituals, the form and distinctive features of the deities, the characteristics of sacred sites, devotees, and priesthood of *kaḷameḻuttu* is intricately intertwined with Tantric Buddhism. These aspects are elaborated upon below.

II. LOCATING TANTRIC BUDDHISM IN THE TRADITION OF *KAḶAMEḺUTTŬ* IN MEDEIVAL KERALA

We must understand the significance of *kaḷameḻuttŭ* as a crucial religious symbolism or expression in non-Brahmanical societies beyond the realm of Brahmanical temples. *Kaḷameḻuttŭ* denotes the ceremonial act of drawing or inscribing *kaḷam*, which itself represents the symbolic and anthropomorphic forms of deities. They are essentially the ritual diagrams embodying the deity itself. Non-Brahmanical deities such as *Bhagavati, Ayyappaṉ, Nāgam, Cāttaṉ and Yakṣi* are worshipped through *kaḷameḻuttŭ*. The forms of deities are depicted using five colours: red, white, yellow, black and green. Within a *kaḷam*, alongside the deity figures, we find geometric shapes, vines, flowers, pedestals, and halos (*prabhāmaṇḍala*). These symbolise the deity's abode (i.e., temple) and the adornments within it. The deity's form itself is regarded as divine. In short, making a *kaḷam* in an open space designates it as the deity's abode (*srīkōvil*). Hence, *kaḷameḻuttŭ* depicts a miniature form of a temple, consisting of a sanctum sanctorum with sacred steps (*svāpānam*), doors and decorations.

The *kaḷam* deities are constructed and worshipped by non-Brahmanical priests. One notable aspect of *kaḷameḻuttŭ* that distinguishes it from Brahmanical temples is the significant presence of female priests. *Kaḷameḻuttŭ* ceremonies are typically performed at *kāvŭ*s and *kōṭṭas*[13], which are non-Brahmanical sacred sites, and are also commonly conducted within houses. Households host *kaḷameḻuttŭ* rituals during

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13 *Kāvŭ*s and *kōṭṭas* are sacred centers dedicated to non-Brahmanical deities, where rituals involving animal sacrifices were practiced.

events such as births, deaths, and illnesses. Upon closer examination of the religious culture of *kaḷameḻuttŭ*, it can be seen that its worship tradition diverges significantly from contemporary Brahmanical practices in Saiva-Vaisnava temples. The worship practice in *kaḷameḻuttŭ*, where the priest transforms into a deity through singing hymns, chanting *mantra*s to the deities, meditatively performing *mudra*s, and engaging in ritual dances, stands in stark contrast to the Brahmanical temple ritual. The ritual dance is believed to lead the priest toward enlightenment. As the priest or priestess steps into the *kaḷam*, they mentally and physically become the deity. Notably, among the deity forms, there is a prevalence of *maithuna* (sacred sex) and ferocious figures compared to pacific ones.

The religious culture of *kaḷameḻuttŭ* was rooted in the concepts of *pañca-makāra* (i.e, *madya, māṁsa, matsya, mudra, and maithuna*) practices (Logan 1995: 176; Sharma 2012: 441). Detailed accounts of animal sacrifices, offerings of flesh, and liquor in *kaḷameḻuttŭ* rituals were described in colonial surveys. These practices have been recorded in late medieval documents such as *Kōḻikkōṭaṉ Granthavari* (Haridas 2008: 57, 58), *Kūṭāḷi Granthavari* (Kurup 1989: 41) and Sabarimala records (Santhosh 2019: 59). In contemporary times, we also observe that a thick, deep red liquid made of water, turmeric powder, and lime is symbolically offered to the *kaḷam*. This mixture resembling blood serves as a symbolic representation in present-day *kaḷameḻuttŭ* rituals (Pasty 2020: 2; Freeman 2016: 8-14; Logan 1995: 176).

Kaḷameḻuttŭ worship is generally held during the *maṇḍala* period (Narayanan 1987: 51; Kurup 1984: 52; Jones 1982: 272; Tarabout 2000: 657). Within *kaḷameḻuttŭ*, the cults of *Bhagavati, Ayyappaṉ*, and *Nagam* are commonly referred to as *maṇḍala* worship. The non-Brahmanic *nāṭuvāḻi svarūpaṁ*s, *Sthāni Nāyar*s and other warriors worshipped these deities in sacred groves to safeguard the wealth and power of their *svarūpaṁ*s (Varier 1984: 4; Frenz 2003: 33). They established martial training centers called *kaḷari* and made these patron deities within these centers (Zarrilli 2002: 26).

The close examination of cultic practices and iconographic traditions within *kaḷameḻuttŭ* reveals intriguing implications that contrast with the temple culture of medieval Kerala. The next section proposes to analyse the influence of *maṇḍala* iconography and ritual context of

Tantric Buddhism in the *kaḷameḻuttŭ*. The iconography of *kaḷameḻuttŭ* is influenced by both the sacred-sex and ferocious aspects of Bhagavati in Tantric Buddhism. As mentioned previously, the deities in the iconography of *kaḷameḻuttŭ* such as *Ayyappaṉ*, *Cāttaṉ* and *Vairōcanaṉ* are also found in the Tantric Buddhism. It also examines the similarity of Tantric Buddhist representation of colour symbolism (*pañca-varṇa*) with the colour concept of *kaḷameḻuttŭ*. The involvement of women dancers in the Nagam worship of *kaḷameḻuttŭ* are found to be parallel to the *yōgini* tradition of Tantric Buddhist *maṇḍala*. The study also discusses the entire world of *mantravāda* traditions of the lower castes, which are parallel to the healing practices of Tantric Buddhist traditions in north India, Tibet, Nepal and so on. The *mantra* tradition with *bījakṣaras*, diagrams and so on in the *mantravādakkaḷam* of these groups is also parallel to the Buddhist-Hybrid Sanskrit *mantras* of Tantric Buddhism. These issues will be further explored below.

II.a. The Maṇḍala Iconography and Ritual context of Tantric Buddhism in the *Kaḷameḻuttŭ*

Upon closer examination of the iconography of rituals and deities of *kaḷameḻuttŭ*, along with their nature and historical context, it becomes evident that it is essentially the *maṇḍala* worship of Tantric Buddhism. The term '*maṇḍala*' is derived from the Sanskrit word for *kaḷam*, both signifying ritual diagrams. It's noteworthy that the worship of *Bhagavati*, *Ayyappaṉ*, and *Nagam* within *kaḷameḻuttŭ* is referred to as *maṇḍala* worship. This form of worship, involving the creation of anthropomorphic figures of deities using five-coloured powders, belongs to Tantric Buddhist religious tradition. Deities such as *Tara, Śrī Heruka, Vajravārāhī, Avalōkitēśvara, Vairōcana, Akṣōbhya, Yōginis*, etc. are depicted within the inner sides of the Buddhist *maṇḍalas* (Bhattacharya 1958: 193-194; English 2002: 4-5).[14] The presence of maithuna, fero-

14 Tantric Buddhism has extensively utilised *maṇḍalas* in various ritual initiations and post-initiatory practices, employing them to establish sacred spaces often understood as the specific domain of a deity (Williams 2000: 199). During the third century CE, Mahayana Buddhism took the lead in producing tantric texts that incorporated the use of *mantras*, *maṇḍalas*, and other elements (Akira 1998: 300-302). Over centuries, Buddhist schools such as Mantrayana and Vajrayana increasingly engaged in ritual and meditative tech-

cious, and peaceful deities within the *kaḷam* reflects the iconographic tradition of Tantric Buddhism, which will be discussed in further detail below.

The ritual practices of *maṇḍala* worship in Tantric Buddhism find continuation in *kaḷameḻuttŭ*. Preparing the *maṇḍala* ground with cow dung, outlining deity figures with white powder, offering the priest *pañca-makāras* to the *maṇḍala*, and the priest becoming the body of the deity through sacred dance — all these elements are shared between *kaḷameḻuttŭ* and *maṇḍala* worship in Tantric Buddhism. The essence of *kaḷameḻuttŭ* is rooted in *pañca-makāra*, which often bears resemblance to systems known as *vāmācāra* and *vīrācāra* in Mahayana Buddhism (Jash 1999: 141). These systems involve the use of meat, fermented liquor, and sexual intercourse as part of their ritual practices. The sacred-sex rituals in *kaḷameḻuttŭ* reflect the sex rituals present in Vajrayana traditions, as will be discussed later. In *Mahākāla-tantra*, the primary text of Tantric Buddhism, it is stated that dark-coloured beans, liquor, meat, and blood are offered during bali rituals (Stablein 1976: 199). Similar rituals can be observed in *kaḷameḻuttŭ*, where the priest offers sacrificial flesh of animals, toddy, rice, and beans to the *kaḷam* deities (Logan 1995: 176).

Readers may wonder how the religious traditions of Buddhist countries from regions such as Tibet, Nepal, China and Ceylon found their way into the *kaḷameḻuttŭ* practices of Kerala. As mentioned earlier, during the early medieval period, Tantric Buddhist practices were widespread in Kerala and South India. The documentation of Kerala's Tantric Buddhist practices in records from Tibet, Nepal, China and Ceylon

niques, incorporating esoteric and magical uses of *mantras* and *maṇḍalas* (Gray 2007: 79). A *maṇḍala* symbolises dynamism and a universal creative cycle. It is considered the dwelling place of the deity and is regarded as a realm of nirvana and peace, or a Buddha field, separated and protected from the ever-changing and impure outer world of *saṁsāra*. Each *maṇḍala* associated with liturgy contained in tantric texts instructs practitioners on how to draw, construct, and visualise it, and indicates the mantras to be recited during its ritual use. The *maṇḍala* identifies the thoughts of Buddhas, which include that of the Buddha himself: the Buddha (enlightenment) is found within his own thoughts, particularly his thought of *bōdhicitta* (enlightenment) (Warder 2000: 461).

suggests the extent of its influence. While the precise nature of their religious culture cannot be fully gleaned from epigraphical evidence, traces of the ritual tradition of Tantric Buddhism can be found in works like *Cilappatikāram* and *Maṇimēkhalai*.

We can see strong evidences of the existence of Tantric Buddhist rituals in Tamilakam. The roots of *kōṭṭa*s, which served as sacred sites for esoteric practices, can be seen in early medieval Tamilakam. References in the *Cilappatikāram* and *Maṇimēkhalai* to sacred sites like *cakkravāḷakkōṭṭam*, *cuṭukāṭṭukkōṭṭam*, *vajrakōṣṭham* are examples. The *cakkravāḷakkōṭṭam* is the model of Vajrayana cosmology with the various *maṇḍala*s of the cosmos (Saroja 1999: 134). *Chattanār* represents the *kōṭṭam* as of philosophical import (Hikosaka 1989: 114). *Chattanār* explained *cuṭukāṭṭukōṭṭam* as located at an isolated place, situated at the end of the city. There are practices of the ferocious dance of the ghost in the *kōṭṭam*. The *Cilapatikāram* and *Maṇimēkhalai* also describe *vajrakōṣṭam* as the sacred centre of the magical and esoteric practices in early medieval Tamilakam (Nair 1989: 119). We have some more evidences on *maṇḍala* worship from the accounts of *Cilappatikāram*. The text shows Madhavi dances (*kūttŭ*) in the *maṇḍala* of *Bhūta*s accompanying music of *pañca-tāḷa* and *stuti*s of *dēvata*s (Nair 1989: 80-85). Thus, the *maṇḍala* concepts of Tantric Buddhism in the *kaḷameḻuttŭ* can be seen in the accounts of *Cilappatikāram*. Late medieval records such as the *Kōḻikkōṭan Granthavari* (1674 CE), the *Vaññeri Granthavari* (recorded in the years of 1606 1657 and 1687), the *Kūṭāḷi Granthavari* (16th CE), the *Kēraḷōtpatti Granthavari*, and the Sabarimala epigraph (1668 CE) describe the late medieval religio-cultic roots of these rituals in detail.

II.b. Sacred-sex and Ferocious Forms of Bhagavati of Tantric Buddhism in the Iconography of *Kaḷameḻuttŭ*

The word '*Bhagavati*' means one who possesses '*Bhaga*'. The term '*Bhaga*' refers to the pudendum or mul/female genital organ (Gundert 1995: 756). As the name implies, the fundamental essence of the deity *Bhagavati* is rooted in sacred sexuality. *Bhagavati* is worshipped by a majority of people in Kerala, all of whom belong to non-Brahmanic societies societies (Choondal 1975: 12; Namboodiri. 2004: 9-283;

Kurup 1980: 17-38; Unni, Sarma 2001: 18-196; Mundekkadu 2002: 58, 74-75, 75-209). We have already seen that this cult of Bhagavati is known as *maṇḍala* worship. It is primarily associated with Jainism or Buddhism (Rao 1992a: 125; Mitra 1999: 102; Bhattacharyya 1999: 125; Mallinson 2019) although the *maithuna* and ferocious nature of the Bhagavati is often linked to Buddhism (Bhattacharya 1999a: 193). An important tenet of Tantric Buddhism states that 'Buddhahood abides in the female organ' (Induchudan 1969: 173). *Bhagavati* worship was particularly popular in both Kerala and South India and was distinct from Brahmanical religion, being closely connected to Jainism and Buddhism. *Bhagavati*s such as *Tiruccāraṇattu Bhagavati* (Rao 1992a: 125) *Kanyākumāri Bhagavati* (Ayyer 2004a: 147, 150-152), *Kumāranallūr Bhagavati* (Rao 1992a: 191)[15] and *Panniyankara Bhagavati* (Varier 2021: 62-63) are documented in medieval inscriptions.

Bhagavati is worshipped in solo form as well as with her consort in *kaḷameḻuttŭ*. *Bhagavatiyum Nṛttagōpālanum* (Narayanan 1987: 51), *Vairajātanum Bhagavatiyum*, *Kāḷarātri*, etc., are the important manifestations of Bhagavati. Upon closer examination of the iconography, it becomes apparent that the form of Bhagavati inscribed in the *kaḷameḻuttŭ* is of maithuna in nature. The *kaḷam* depicts Bhagavati seated with her thighs spread on the *aramaṇḍala*, and she is worshipped in almost all ritual occasions in this posture. Upon close inspection, one can discern a male phallus descending into Bhagavati's vaginal canal in the *kaḷam* (Shibi 2016: 102, 103). The phallus is drawn in such a way that it is not part of the *kaḷam* itself; its depiction as a male organ becomes apparent only after careful examination of the iconography. The space where the phallus and Bhagavati's vagina are imagined to meet is where the lamp is usually lit, as devotees believe that the power of Bhagavati resides in that space.[16] This symbolism parallels the concept of *maṇi-pad-*

15 Kesavan Veluthat has attempted to argue that the Kumaranallur Bhagavati temple was originally a Saiva temple, basing his argument on local legend (Veluthat 2013: 52). He asserts that it is a Saiva temple on the understanding that Bhagavati is a non-Brahmanical deity. However, he acknowledges that it is historically inaccurate to view the non-Brahmanical Bhagavati as the patron deity of the Brahmana village of Kumaranallur.

16 This expression is taken from Sundaran, Teyyampati Kuruppu, *kaḷameḻuttŭ*

ma (phallus-female organ) intercourse in Tantric Buddhism. Bhagavati is depicted in this form in south Malabar. Apart from this *kaḷam*, the practice of worshiping Bhagavati as *Aṣṭadaḷapatmam* is also seen.[17] In such cases, the phallus tip is depicted rising into the petals, which are considered as the navel of Bhagavati. Bhagavati's ritual song (*kēśādipāda-varṇana*) essentially praises her *maithuna* form (*kāma-varṇana*). There is a passage in the ritual song that praises the deity, referred to as '*ammaṇa-chāya*'. Bhagavati's iconographic features are extolled in this part today (Mundekkadu 2000: 120), but the word '*ammaṇa*' signifies nakedness or nudity, as well as ideas of nirvana and shramana (Pillai 1994: 107) that are associated with Jainism and Buddhism. Hence, the '*ammaṇa*' section of the ritual song refers to the practice of glorifying Bhagavati's nakedness or nudity, possibly transformed after Brahmanisation into a general description of Bhagavati's iconographic features.

The significance of female deities in Tantric Buddhist religious practices defines the central focus on Bhagavati worship in kaḷameḻuttŭ. The iconography of Bhagavati in *kaḷameḻuttŭ* bears striking resemblance to the imagery associated with the wrathful and sacred-sex deities of Tantric Buddhist *maṇḍala*, particularly the supreme Buddhist goddess *Tāra* and her manifestation as *Vajravārāhī* (Bhattacharya 1999a: 193). They are depicted with garlands of heads hanging from their necks. In their two-armed form, they hold a knife and a skull cup in the right hands, and an arrow and a sword in the left hands. In their four-armed form, they carry a sword, an arrow, a thunderbolt, and a knife in the right hands, and a bow, a lotus, an axe, and a skull in the left hands. In their eight-armed form, they exhibit the same array of implements distributed among their multiple arms. (Bhattacharya 1999a: 199). This imagery mirrors the iconography observed in Bhagavati worship in *kaḷameḻuttŭ*.

The concept of the divine couple in Tantric Buddhist *maṇḍala*s also influences the idea of *maithuna* in *kaḷameḻuttŭ*. In Tantric Buddhist *maṇḍala*, the divine couple is often depicted in *maithuna* form

priest in north Malabar, Interview, 24.03.2009

17 We find references of *Aṣṭadaḷapatmam* as a part of fertility cults (Vatsyayan and Coomaraswamy 1995: 118-122). The lotus is invariably a symbolic representation of the female genital organ. In Buddhist Tantricism, the lotus is the literal rendering of *bhaga* or *yōni* (Chattopadyaya 1968: 281).

(sexual embrace), such as *Heruka* and his consort *Vajravārahi* in *Cakrasaṁvara-maṇḍala*, *Kālacakra* and his consort *Viśvamāta* in *Kālacakra-maṇḍala*, *Vajrabhairava* and his consort *Vajravētāḷi* in *Vajrabhairava-maṇḍala* and so on. The deity *Vajravārāhī* has been described as deity Bhagavati (Mitra 1999: 102; Bhattacharyya 1999: 125) in *sādhanas* 217, 218, 219, 221, 226 and 227 of *Sādhanamāla*. *Vajravārāhī* is depicted in these *maṇḍala* as part of a divine couple engaged in sexual intercourse with *Śrī Heruka* (Gray 2007b: 703). Sexual imagery is interpreted as a metaphor for enlightenment, symbolising qualities of unity and completion (Mitra 1999: 102). Couples like *Bhagavatiyum Nṛttagōpālanum* and *Vairajātanum Bhagavatiyum* are prominent among the deities in *kaḷameḻuttŭ*. The *maithuna* aspect has persisted through the representation of Bhagavati alongside her consort, *Nṛttagōpāla*. However, with the Brahmanisation of rituals over time, it is likely that the characteristic features of sexual union may have been modified or removed.

In the *Kālavivēka* of *Jīmūtavāhana*,[18] it is stated that the *Śabarōtsava* in Bengal included songs about sex organs and sexual intercourse, accompanied by requisite movements of the body (Bhattacharya 1999b: 216). These *maithuna* worships are also found in the Kerala's Bhagavati cults (Cadwell 1996: 211-212), with the Bhagavatikkavu in Kotungallur serving as just one example. Scholars have already noted its connection with Tantric Buddhism (Induchudan 1969: 172). The Mahayana Buddhist deity of the *Śabaras* also came to be known as '*sarva-sabaranam-bhagavati*' signifying the goddess Bhagavati of all the *Śabaras* (Bhattacharya 1999b: 215). The sacred-sex concept of Bhagavati and Buddha depicted in the Tantric Buddhist *maṇḍala* parallels the sacred-sex concept of Bhagavati and her consorts in *kaḷameḻuttŭ*. As mentioned earlier, the *Avalōkitēśvara-Tāra* cult was well-known in Kerala, and the cult of *Tāra Bhagavati* was popular in the Konkan region and Kadri. Scholars also argue that Kannaki is a manifestation of *Tāra* (Kandaswamy 1999: 274), representing a Buddhist goddess, with *Cilappatikāram* describing her as a goddess of chastity (Hikosaka 1989: 169).

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18 *Kālaviveka* is a comprehensive analysis of the auspicious *kāla* (time) for performing religious rites and rituals, and the text is believed to have been written after 1093 AD.

The Kannaki cult had a profound influence on the worship of Bhagavati in *kaḷameḻuttŭ* (Aiyer 1990: 235-238). *Nṛttagopāla*, portrayed as Bhagavati's consort, is identified with *Kōvalan*, who is the consort of Kannaki. In depictions, Kōvalan's left hand holds Kannaki's anklet. The worship of Bhagavati is also linked with Manimekhalai, the Buddhist sea goddess of Tamilakam. Medieval records mention that Bhagavati is worshipped in the coastal regions of South India, like Manimekhalai, safeguarding seafaring merchants and devotees from unforeseen challenges (Namboothiri 1987; Gentes 1992: 312-313). In *kaḷameḻuttŭ*, Bhagavati is also referred to as '*Maṇimaṅka*' (Unni and Sarma 2001: 132-169), another sea goddess. This deity in *kaḷameḻuttŭ* bears a striking resemblance to Manimekhalai and a female bodhisattva in Mahayana teachings of South India. The term *Maṇimaṅka* is also closely connected with *Maṇimēgha Pattini*, which is what Kannaki is widely known as in Sri Lanka (Obeyesekere 1984: 120). Bhagavati is considered the deity of the Kerala coast, with *Keraḷolpatti* suggesting that Bhagavati was worshipped as the sea goddess by the local populace even before Brahman settlements. This indicates the presence of Tantric Buddhist sea goddesses who protected south Indian coastal trade, including Manimekhalai, *Tāra* and Kannaki. The sacred sites of sea goddesses are known as *vaṭṭams* (Varier 1984: 3-5). The name *mukkāl-vaṭṭam* refers to medieval sacred sites.[19] They also commemorate the Caityas of the Buddhist tradition. Scholars have noted that the circular and apsidal sanctuaries of temples have evolved from Buddhist Caityas (Brown 1942: 19-26). Thus, the concepts of sea goddesses, wrath, and the ferocious nature of Tara, Kannaki, *Maṇimaṅka* and others formed the divine character of Bhagavati in Kerala. In this way, we can understand that the worship of Bhagavati in *kaḷameḻuttŭ* is, in fact, the *maṇḍala* and *maithuna* worship of Tantric Buddhism. The characteristic of sacred sex is also evident in the iconography of Nagam, which will be discussed below.

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19 Medieval Kerala inscriptions refer to the structures of temples as kōyil or mukkālvaṭṭam (See Narayanan 1996: Index A 1-C: 435-501).

II.c. Ayyappan and Cāttan̲ of Tantric Buddhism in the Iconography of *Kaḷameḻuttŭ*

Ayyappan and Cāttan̲ are, alongside Bhagavati, among the most commonly worshipped deities in *kaḷameḻuttŭ* rituals. Similar to the worship of Bhagavati, the practice of worshipping Ayyappan and Cāttan̲ is known as *maṇḍala* worship. Unlike *Tāra Bhagavati*, who is depicted in *maṇḍala* worships in Tibet, Nepal or China, Ayyappan and Cāttan̲ are typically not represented. However, they are worshipped as distinct deities in south Indian Buddhism. In south India, Ayyappan and Cāttan̲ were worshipped as two variations of the same deity, with Ayyappan equated with *Śasta* and *Śāsta* as a Brahmanised or Sanskritised form of Cāttan̲.

Ayyappan appears as a hunting deity, often depicted in a ferocious form during *kaḷameḻuttŭ* rituals (Iyer 1984: II 134). Occasionally, he is portrayed alongside a horse, holding an arrow and a bow in his right hand (Dages 1997: 869). Scholars have suggested a similarity between Ayyappan and the cult of Buddha (Narayanan 1996: 182). Ayyappan, the deity worshipped in *kaḷameḻuttŭ* and throughout south India, is equated with the Buddhist deity known as *Ayyanāyake* in Sri Lanka. The legends associated with Ayyappan, prevalent in *kaḷameḻuttŭ* and South India, also parallel those of the Buddhist deity *Ayyanāyake*.

Ayyanāyake is depicted as a regal warrior who ventures into the jungle for hunting, often portrayed riding a horse or an elephant and closely associated with wild elephants and the jungle. He is the popular form of the south Indian guardian deity *Ayyan* or *Ayyanār* (Bastin 2002: 21, 147-151). The title '*Śāsta*' is also attributed to Ayyanāyake and the Buddha alike.

Along with the aforementioned, we can also see the features of *Avalōkitēśvara* in Ayyappan. We have evidence to understand that the *Avalōkitēśvara maṇḍala* that existed in the Western Ghats was transformed into worship of Ayyappan's *maṇḍala*. These aspects are discussed in detail in the section on Brahmanisation.

The worship of Cāttan̲, in fact, represents the most widespread and extensive tradition among non-Brahmanic communities in Kerala (Parpola 2012: 177-199; Tarabout 2000: 657). The *Cilappatikāram* mentions *pāṣaṇḍa bhairavanām Cāttan̲* (Nair 1992: 146). This is a reference to the Buddha. The *Bṛhannarādiya-purāṇa* calls Buddhists *pāṣaṇḍa*s (Chakrabarti 2001: 148). The images of Cāttan̲ or *Sāsta* discovered from different parts of south India further indicate Buddhist influences (Obeyesekere 1987: 588-590). Cāttan̲ is also frequently associated with *Ayyanāyake* (Bastin 2002: 21). Moreover, Cāttan̲ is widely worshipped in Sri Lanka.

II.d. The Deity Vairōcanan of Tantric Buddhism in the Iconography of *Kaḷamel̲uttŭ*

Through inscriptions and literary works, we have seen evidence of worship of *bodhisattva*s on the Konkan coast, Kadri and northern Kerala. Among them, the worship of the deity *Vairōcanan* is particularly significant. This deity is also mentioned in *Mūṣakavaṁśakāvya* (Unni 1980: 62-64). Additionally, he is one of the five *dhyāni* Buddhas, represented by the colour white, which symbolises space. The seed syllable 'om' is represented on *Vairōcanan*'s forehead (Bhattacharya 1958: 53-54). This form of the deity is worshipped in *kaḷamel̲uttŭ* in the locale of the Kola *svarupam* line, which traces itself from the later lineage of *Mūṣakavamśa*.

The deity is also known as *Vairajātan* in *kaḷamel̲uttu*. The iconographic features of the two are the same. The term *Vairajātan* means 'one who is born from *vaira* or *vajra*,' which is similar to the deity *Vairōcana*. It is mentioned in *bhakti* hymns that Vairajātan was born from the seed syllable *om*. Alongside *Vairajātan*, his consort Bhagavati is also depicted in the *kaḷam*. Bhagavati is typically portrayed in yellow. Likewise, in addition to *Vairōcana*, *Tāra* and her manifestations are widely represented in Buddhist maṇḍalas. The sacred sites of *Tāra* Bhagavati on the Konkan coast and Mangalore are also referred to as *kāvŭ*s (Mallinson 2019), a subject that warrants separate study. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the *kaḷam* of *Vairājātan* and Bhagavati reflect the maṇḍala worship of *Vairōcanan* and *Tāra Bhagavati*.

In addition to the aforementioned iconography, some minor forms are also observed in cultic practices in Kerala, such as *Bhairavan*, *Yakṣan*, *Gandharvan*, *Mātaṅgi* and others. These various forms of iconography in *kaḷameḻuttŭ* also exhibit similarities to Tantric Buddhist iconography.

II.e. Colour Symbolism of Tantric Buddhism in the *Kaḷameḻuttŭ*

The most significant aspect of *kaḷameḻuttŭ* is the use of *pañca-varṇas* in depicting the *kaḷam* of deities. The five colours — white, yellow, red, black, and green — are fundamental to *kaḷameḻuttŭ* (Freeman 1997: 13; Jones 1982: 273-274). It is evident that these colour concepts are rooted in the tradition of Tantric Buddhism, where these colours also play a central role in the *maṇḍalas*. In Tantric Buddhism, *maṇḍala* deities are symbolised through these five colours. *Vairōcana*, as mentioned above, is represented by white, symbolising delusion. *Ratnasambhava* is yellow, representing pride. *Akṣōbhya* is blue/black, signifying hatred. *Amitabha* is red, symbolising passion, while *Amoghasiddhi* is green, representing envy (Biswas 1999: 159; Wayman 1999: 127-132). Early Buddhist tantras also mention the concept of the polarity of red and white colours, which are associated with certain deities encircled by a red and a white aureole. The polarity of red and white represents the female-male principles (Gray 2007a: 160).

In *kaḷameḻuttu*, similar to Tantric Buddhist *maṇḍalas*, the five colours represent the deity. In *Aṣṭadaḷapatmam*, there is a depiction of a white lotus with eight petals enclosed by three circles of white, red, and black colours, surrounded by a quadrilateral with red colour. The white, red, and black circles symbolise male-female principles. The predominant red colour in Bhagavati's *kaḷam* symbolises the essence of female principles. The colours associated with the deity *Tāra* influence the colours of Bhagavati in *kaḷameḻuttŭ*. The depiction of yellow *Tāra* as a consort of *Akṣōbhya* (Bhattacharya 1999a: 200) parallels the iconography of Bhagavati with yellow colour, a practice observed in north Kerala. The green form of Bhagavati, typically seen in the *kaḷam* of north Kerala, resembles the concept of the green *Tāra* in the Indo-Tibetan tradition. We have already looked at the similarity in the symbolism of white between *Vairajātan* in *kaḷameḻuttŭ* and *Vairōcanan* in Tantric Buddhism.

II.f. The Yōgini Traditions and Nagam worship of Tantric Buddhism in the Kaḷameḻuttŭ

The ritual practices and religious traditions of Tantric Buddhism are most prominently preserved today in the cult of Nagam worship in Kerala. It is also known as *maṇḍala* worship. Along with Ayyappan and Bhagavati, Nagam is among the most worshipped deities in Kerala (Jones 1982: 271). In the Naga *kaḷam*, the figures are of two snakes engaged in sexual union. The sacred-sex imagery forms the foundation of Nagam cults in Kerala. A document related to Sabarimala dating back to 1668 CE records Nagam worship at the eastern entrance of the temple (Santhosh 2019: 56). Late medieval *granthavari*s also recount ritual occasions of Naga worship. The significance of female priests continues even today in Nagam worship. Initially, women create the *kaḷam* of the Nagam deities on the ground, sing hymns in praise, and perform ritual dances. In fact, this ritual practice carried out by women is considered a form of priesthood. *Puḷḷuva* women make the *kaḷam* and sing the hymns, while Nair women perform the dance. Surprisingly, no scholar has yet interpreted these ritual functions of women as priesthood. The same priestly duties performed by male priests in Bhagavati and Ayyappan worship are carried out by women in Nagam worship. The *Vaññēri Granthavari* documents the depiction of the Nagam deity and women who sit in the kaḷam (Narayanan 1987: 51-52). These women are referred to as *Nāgayakṣi*, *Yakṣiyamma*, *Nāgakanyaka*, *Nāgarājñi*, *Yakṣikanyaka*, *Kanyaka*, and so forth. They sit and dance within the ritual diagrams of the deity and are rewarded with oil and cloth by the landlords (Narayanan 1987: 51-52).

The worship of non-human female beings within the *maṇḍala* in Tantric Buddhism becomes a characteristic feature of the Naga *kaḷam* in Kerala. As mentioned earlier, Tantric Buddhist *maṇḍala*s often depict sexual imagery and the embrace of deities (English 2002: 4-5). *Subahu-pariprccha-tantra* and *Guhysamaja-tantra* describe the sacred sexual practices of *Yogin*s with *Yogini*s at secret and isolated places for attaining enlightenment. They perform tantric dances in the *varṇa-maṇḍala*s of the deities. These dances are supposed to lead the priests to *nirvāṇa*. For our purposes, this is the source of the ritual dance of the *kaḷameḻuttŭ*

priests. These Tantric Buddhist *Yoginis* are also known as *Guhyakas*, or secret ones (Gray 2007a: 84-91). Interestingly, we observe that the same terms are used for the priestesses of the Naga *kaḷam* in Kerala.

This Nagam worship primarily revolves around women and is focused on progeny and wealth. It is always associated with the fertility and *maithuna* cults. In the Naga *kaḷam* the sexual union of two snakes symbolically represents the deities *Nagarāja* and *Nagarājñi*.[20] Men also dance with women on certain occasions in the ritual. Priests who dance in kaḷam are imagined as deities. That is, each dancing woman and each dancing man symbolises the *Nagarāja* and *Nagarājñi*. When the deity enters the priests' bodies and they begin to dance, they become *Yogins* and *Yoginis*. The sacred dance of the priests metaphorically expresses the sexual union.

The *sādhana* texts of Tantric Buddhism discuss such sexual union as a form of meditation, believing it to lead to supreme or Buddha awakening. These texts also describe the adept's self-consecration, wherein the adept visualises her or his body (*kāyamaṇḍala*) as a deity (Gray 2007a: 56, 275, 337-342;). This concept is found in the sacred rite of *kaḷameḻuttŭ* as well. In fact, this transformation is the central ceremony of *kaḷameḻuttŭ*.

The hymns of the Naga *kaḷam* by the *Puḷḷuva* describe *Vinata* and *Kadru* as *vēśa* or *vēśaṉmār*. These terms signify individuals who practice the knowledge of *vaśīkaraṇa* or seduction. Interestingly, the same term can be found widely in *Maṇipravāḷa* texts in Kerala (Pilla 1962b: 52).

We do not see priestesses in today's *kaḷameḻuttu* ritual of Bhagavati and Ayyappan. The exception for Bhagavati worship is the case of Kodungallur. In other instances, male priests disguise themselves as women

20 A particular plot of ground in the house-yard is cleansed with cow dung and diagrams of Nagam deities are drawn with five coloured powders. The priest recites *mantras*, and sings ritual songs in praise of the Nagas. A number of women are made to sit within the figure. As the priests sing, the young women start moving their heads in circles apparently under the influence of the Nagam deity. They go into an unconscious state and wipe off the figure of snakes and begin to speak as the deities themselves (Panikkar 1909: 146-148).

oracles (Caldwell 2003: 256-267). It is likely that women were involved in all *kaḷameḻuttŭ* forms previously, and only later did it get restricted to the Naga *kaḷam*.

The Tantric Buddhist concept of the *Yōgini* can also be observed in later contexts of the Sangam period. *Cilappatikāram* mentions *Dākini* and *Yakṣini* as non-human beings possessing magical powers. Numerous references exist about the sacred sexual union of *Yakṣini*s in isolated places in Tamil literary works (Nair 1992: 192). These practices have also been described in the Buddhist text *Manjuśrīmūlkalpa* (Shashtri 1998: 557). Mātaṅgi is also depicted as a manifestation of a Buddhist Yōgini (Buhnemann 2000: 30-41). *Divyāvadāna*, a Buddhist text written in the early first century CE, mentions the extra-human power and esoteric practices of a *Mātaṅga* woman (Neil 1886: 611–59). In north Malabar, the group called *Kaṇiyans* worship Mātaṅgi by drawing her *kaḷam*. References to Mātaṅgi in south Indian context portray her as an outcaste who serves as a village oracle. During rituals, she engages in sacred sex with men of higher caste (Caldwell 2003: 255, 265-266. *Manipravāḷa* literature refers to the *Mātaṅgikanmār* (this is the male counterpars) as *Nampyār*s (male dancers) (Pilla 1962a: 27-28). Scholars have argued that references to love and sex in *Maṇipravāḷa* literature are indicative of the sacred-sex traditions of tantric society (Freeman 2003: 177). The antecedents of this Tantric Buddhsit *Yōgini* tradition can be found in *Cilappatikāram* and *Maṇimēkhalai*. The great heroine Mādhavi in these literary works is described as a woman with religious attributes, and also depicts her involvement in sacred-sex. Her mother Citrāpati and her daughter Maṇimēkhala also represent the same lineage (Nair 1989: 80-85, 206). Later, Mādhavi and her daughter Maṇimēkhala departed from the *Yōgini* traditions and embraced the way of nuns as per Tantric Buddhism (Viswambharan 1990: 22-23, 29, 76).

We have observed indications of the Tantric Buddhist cult of Yōginis among Caṇḍāla families in Pulliramalaya and Kanakagiri in the Western Ghats of Kerala (Gray 2007a: 333). Kanakagiri continues to be a Jain sacred site even today. Additionally, there are references to the continuation of esoteric practices in the sacred site of Pulliramalaya during the medieval period (Gundert 1868: 32). We have examined all of these instances above.

The roots of *Yōgini* traditions can an be seen in the temple inscriptions of Kerala. Terms such as *Naṅgacci*, *Naṅgayar*, *Naṅgai*, *Tēvaṭicci* and *Peṇkulam* are frequently met with in the Chera inscriptions. These were the female dancers in the medieval temples. A gift of land by *Ciṟṟaṟayil Naṅṅyār* is mentioned in the *Cōkkūr* inscription (898 AD) of Kota Ravi (Narayanan 1996: Index A 8). This is perhaps the earliest known reference to a *Naṅṅyār* in Chera inscriptions. *Mēṟṟalippuṟattu Śankara Naṅgacci* is mentioned as donor in a Neḍumpuram Taḷi inscription (900? AD) of Indu Kota (Ibid: Index A 27). *Śrīdhara Naṅgacci*, alias *Tribhuvana Mahādēvi*, made land gifts to the same temple in the 18th year of Bhaskara Ravi (962- 1021 AD) (Ibid: Index A 43). The Tiruvidaikodu inscription records the gift of some lands by Udaiyamaṅgala Naṅgai of Marudattur, a village in Kurunadu for certain offerings to the deity (Ayyer 1925: 45, 146). The Tiruvalla plates also describe the grants of paddy by a *Naṅṅyār* to the temple. A gift of land and a lamp by *Kuṉran Ciru Naṅgai* is mentioned in the Kinalur Jaina record. Four *Tēvaṭicci*s attached to Tiruvalla temple received 12 *nāḻi* rice on the day of Onam for their performance (Ibid: Index A 80). The Kilimanur copper plates of 1168 AD record the temple services of *Tēvaṭicci*s (Ramachandran 2011: 197). The Vatakkumnathan temple record mentions a term, *peṇkulam*. Some scholars argue this refers to *dēvadaśi*s (Ibid: 379, 380).

These temple servants received all the endowments, gifts, and donations from the royal authorities. They played an important role in land grants and donations to the medieval temples (Narayanan 1996: 350). But the descriptions of their religious traditions or social life are not found in the inscriptions. At the same time, this is described in the *Maṇipravāḷa* works. When we examine these works, we see clear indications that all these dancers are *Yōgini*s. We understand that they have some kind of a connection with Tantric Buddhist rituals when we examine the references in the *Maṇipravāḷa* works. References to the *Acciyār* in the *Maṇipravāḷa* literature represent the remnants of Tantric Buddhist *Yōginis*.[21] They are commonly referred to as *vēśyas* (Nair 1997: 68;

21 The tradition where dancers are called *Acciyār* is also found in the *Cilappatikāram*. The *kuravaikūttu* of the *Acciyār* is described in this text. See *Cilappatikāram* XVII

Pilla 1962b: 143). It is significant that they worship the deity Kamadeva and perform sacred-sex during festival of *Candra* (full moon day). References go old nuns worshiping Kamadeva are also observed in *Candrōlsavam* (Pilla 1962b: 42).[22] It is evident that these women with religious attributions in *Maṇipravāḷa* literature represent the Tantric Buddhist *Yogini*s. Furthermore, the ritual dances of *Srāvakas* (i.e., Buddhists) with sacred swords and their ritual songs are also referenced in *Candrōlsavam* (Ibid: 138, 176).[23] The Buddhist Tantra texts mention that these *Srāvaka* are drawn along with Buddhas in the *maṇḍala*s of *Vairōcana* (Wayman, 1998: 88). It is noteworthy that *Candrōlsavam* describes the festival conducted on the day of '*cittirai paurṇami*' (full-moon day of month '*cittirai*'). The birthday of Buddha is celebrated on the full-moon day of the month of *cittira*. It is apparent that the ritual context and day of celebration in *Candrōlsavam* are heavily influenced by the Buddhist tradition. In fact, Candrōlsavam was celebrated as a *maithuna* (sacred-sex) festival of *Acciyār* in medieval Kerala. In this context, we should also remember the presence of Tantric Buddhist *Yōgini*s in the Western Ghats, as recorded in Tibetan texts.

In the *Vaiśika-Tantra*, we observe numerous repetitions of the line stating that the '*tantra mārga*' is the life of *Naṅṅyār*s. The text also states that this *mārga* is '*Vaiśikam kūttu*'.[24] In other words, the text reiterates that the *Naṅṅyār* engage in tantric dance. *Vaśīkaraṇa* is an important rite for Buddhist adepts. They perform six *ābhicāra* rites to attain the desired *siddhi*. One of them is *vaśīkaraṇa*. The remaining five are *Māraṇa* (destruction of enemies), *uccaṭana* (destruction of dwelling houses), *staṃbhana* (restraining), *ākarṣaṇa* (attracting) and *śāntika* (propitiatory). These are described in the *Guhyasamāja-tantra* (Bhattacharya 1931: XVII, 66, 67, 84, 87, 96). The word '*naṅga*' means 'naked' (Abhayadev 1999: 717). It should be understood from this that the *Naṅṅyār* perform naked dances. There are three types of dancers mentioned in the *Vaiśika-Tantra*. They are *uttama*, *madhyama* and

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22 *Candrōtsavam*, Part I, *ślōka* 74

23 Ibid., Part IV, *ślōka* 27 and Part V, *ślōka* 25

24 *Vaiśika-Tantra*, see *ślōka*s 1, 4, 5, 266

adhama.[25] These three types of dancers are also seen in Nedumpuram Tali inscription. The record says that three types of *Naṅṅyārs* danced in the temple (Narayanan 1996: Index A 9). What kind of dance did they perform? They performed sexual yoga, according to the *Vaiśika-Tantra*.[26] Tantric Buddhist rituals are performed based on yoga.

We know that the word *'uttama'* refers to Brahmanisation.[27] But *'uttama'* holds great significance in Buddhism too. It refers to the state in which the Yogi acquires complete *siddhi*. A Yogi attains siddhi through *'sāmānya'* and *'uttama'*. The terms *'uttama siddhi'* and *'uttama seva'* are found in Tantric Buddhist rites. The rites performed in the latter include the six limbs of Yoga: *Pratyāhāra*, *Dhyāna*, *Prāṇāyāma*, *Dhāraṇā*, *Anusmṛti*, and *Samādhi* (Bhattacharya 1931: X-XV). The remnants of these practices are mentioned in the *Vaiśika-Tantra*. It can be asserted that the systems followed by *madhyama* and *adhama* dancers are non-Brahmanical. Worship in *vāmācāra or vīrācāra* rites is taken as following these system in rituals. *Naṅṅyār* performances according to these system imply that their performances involve sexual yoga. *Maṇipravāḷa* literature provides many examples of this. Moreover, Marco Polo records that dancing girls perform dances, music and other entertainment in the monasteries, and that they offer savoury dishes to the deity (Murray 1844: 300-301). C Minakshi says that these monasteries are Buddhist temples and the deity is Buddha. She argues that these women-dancers are connected with Buddhist religious institutions (Pilla 1931: 281). Anyway, this Yogini tradition, which continued until the medieval period, is still present in the tradition of the Naga *kaḷam*.

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25 Ibid. *ślōka* 86

26 See for the text Ibid. *ślōka*s 50, 55, 266

27 The word *'uttama'* means highest (Narayanan 1996: 351; Gundert 1995: 128). In the pre-modern era, all Brahmanical systems are commonly referred to by this term. Medieval documents reveal that highest feast were described as *'uttama akkiram'*, (Narayanan 1996: Index: A 23: 445), and dancers of the highest rank were referred to as *'uttama nangayar'* (Narayanan 1996: Index A 9; Vaiśika-Tantra: Ślōka 86). Brahmans of the highest rank were also referred to as *'uttama Brahmans'* (Narayanan 1996: Index: C 35: 497-498). Brahmanical rituals were also labelled as *'uttama'*. The Brahmanical system held the highest status during the medieval period, which is why this erm was widely used in place of the Brahmanised system.

II.g. Locating Buddhist-Hybrid Sanskrit Mantras and Tantric Buddhist Healing Traditions in the Contexts of Mantravāda kaḷam

The iconographic features of Tantric Buddhist deities, rituals, initiations, and practices of the people are all derived from their sacred texts. The world has primarily come to understand the ritual tradition of Mahayana and Tantric Buddhism through tantric *sādhana* texts that have survived in Nepal, Tibet, China and other regions. A substantial amount of evidence from these texts support the argument that the religious practices of *kaḷameḻuttŭ* belong to Tantric Buddhism. The only known sacred text from Kerala that can definitively be attributed to Tantric Buddhism is the *Ārya-Mañjuśrī*-mūlakalpa the manuscript of which was found in southern Travancore. Sacred texts detailing the iconographic features, rituals, and initiations of deities such as Bhagavati, Ayyappan, Cāttaṉ and Nagam have not yet been recovered from Kerala. However, illustrated manuscripts (*citra-ōla*) featuring figures of these deities have been discovered in various parts of Kerala. These manuscripts have been collected in the manuscript repositories of the Thrippinithura Paliam palace and the University of Calicut.

Sacred texts containing information about *kaḷameḻuttŭ* deities and religious culture, similar to Mahayana texts, are not available in Kerala. However, manuscripts recording *kaḷameḻuttŭ* mantras, as well as rituals related to *mantravāda* are abundant. The names of the deities in these are of Sanskrit origin. These mantras are chanted during the ritual performances, serving as brief forms of praise or as articulations of the syllables of the deity (Freeman 2003: 164-168; Tarabout 2000: 654-659). This practice takes place around the ritual diagrams known as *mantravāda kaḷam*, and involves kaḷameḻuttŭ rituals performed for sacred healing purposes. *Kaṇiyans*, *Tīyyas*, *Maṇṇāns*, *Pulaya*s and *Paraya*s are involved in *mantravāda kaḷam* for various purposes such as birth rituals, disease removal, and death rituals. This represents a special type of kaḷameḻuttŭ within the traditional healing practice. Mantras like *uccaṭana*, *vidvēṣaṇa*, *ākarṣana*, *māraṇa* and *vaśīkaraṇa* are also found in the context of *mantravāda kaḷam* (Fawcett 1901: 306-318; Freeman 2003: 164-168; Tarabout 2000: 654-659). Interestingly, mantras for Cāttaṉ, Yakṣi, Gandharvan, Bhūtam, Mātaṃgi and Bhairavan (Freeman

2003: 164; Tarabout 2000: 654-657) are chanted during healing traditions among lower castes in Kerala. These mantras predominantly consist of Malayalam and Sanskrit terms (Fawcett 1901: 316; Freeman 2003: 172). Collections of palm leaves containing *yantra*s and meditation mantras of the aforementioned deities are held by non-Brahmanical societies, including the Nayar, Ezhava, Mannan, Malayan and Pulluva communities.

The presence of illustrated manuscripts with figures of deities and palm-leaf collections of Sanskrit-derived mantra-*yantra* traditions, are sufficient facts to prove that kaḷameḻuttŭ had the support of scriptural tradition. It is worth noting that the mantras and *yantra*s in the *mantravāda* manuscripts are composed in a hybrid language of Sanskrit and Malayalam. This language bears similarities to the language used in the Mahayana and later tantric *sūtra*s. Mahayana Buddhist canons were also written in hybrid Sanskrit, that is, mixed with regional or vernacular languages of Prakrit and Pali. Such forms of the language is known as 'Buddhist-Hybrid Sanskrit'. It is sometimes called 'Buddhist Sanskrit' or 'Mixed Sanskrit'.[28]

A close examination of the mantras of the symbolic diagrams or *yantra*s of kaḷameḻuttŭ indicates that the layers of language used in the mantras very much corresponds to Buddhist-Hybrid Sanskrit. For example one of these mantras reads: 'ōm namo bhagavato'. The term 'bhagavato' is Buddha and clearly points to the structure of Vajrayana *sadhana* practices (Stablein 1976: 199). If we observe the mantras in *mantravāda kaḷam*, many of them can be found in Tantric Buddhist texts. The mantra for protecting others, for obtaining control over women, for control over all Yakṣas and divinities, etc. are explained in the Tantric Buddhist texts as well as the *mantravāda* manuscripts of lower caste groups in Kerala. The purpose and structure of many mantras is the same as in Buddhist Tantras. Even the ritual ingredients used in many mantras are the same in both places. The mantra for suppressing mental disorders, *jvara* and *vyādhi*, the *bali* mantra for killing enemies, protection from *prēta* spirits, suppressing speech, and so on in *mantravāda kaḷam* of the *Kaṇiyans* (Lalitambika 2011: 115) can be also seen in Tantric Bud-

28 Edgerton 1998: 1-5.

dhism. Simultaneously, the mantras for *sthaṃbhana*, *māraṇa*, *uccāṭana*, *ākarṣaṇa*, and *vidvēṣaṇa* in *mantravāda* (sacred healing) belong to the mantra of *yama* in Tantric Buddhism (Buhnemann 1999: 314).

As seen above, the kaḷameḻuttŭ called *mantravāda kaḷam* is performed as part of the religious healing tradition. It is believed that neurotic diseases like epilepsy affect the human body due to the attack of some deities, and if the deities are appeased by *mantravāda*, the disease will be removed from the body and the person will be cured (Panikkar 1909: 209). The priest who performs these ceremonies is seen as a healer with extraordinary powers. The priest or healer possesses the power of taking human lives through the instrumentality of the mantras. During this ritual context, the ritual healer usually draws the *kaḷam* of Gandharvan, Bhairavan, Guḷikan, Yakṣan, and so on. The healer offers sacrificial flesh of animals, toddy and seeds to the *kaḷam*. The sick man or woman is made to sit in front of the figure. After the puja, priest starts the ritual songs, and the sick person begins to shake under the influence of the deity (Logan 1995: 176; Lalithambika 2011: 216-217). After this rite, the healer gives information as regards the departure of the deity from the sick person's body. These healing traditions were practiced by primarily non-Brahmanical groups in Kerala.

Mantrayana and Vajrayana Buddhism also talk about the acquisition of magical powers to cure disease, to ward off demonic attacks and to stave off death. In this way, the Buddhist teacher also acts as a healer who possessed extraordinary powers and magical healing abilities (Zysk 1991: 1-32, 50-51). In the case of the *mantravāda kaḷam*, *brānti* or mental disorder is caused by the attack of Cāttaṉ. The mantra of *Kuṭṭicāttan* heals mental disorders. It is also parallel to the cultic tradition of the *ābhicāra* rites of bhrānti (creating madness) in Tantric Buddhism (Buhnemann 1999: 314). This ritual context of the healing practice can also be seen in the context of ancient Tamilakam. The ritual dances performed before the deity during the *indiravil̲a*, as well as the flesh offerings made for removing *piṇi* or diseases, also belongs to the ritual context of the *mantravāda kaḷam*.

Controversies exist among scholars regarding the Sanskrit traditions of non-Brahman societies. In the midst of this controversy, this study suggests that the source of their Sanskrit tradition is Tantric Buddhism. There is a proposal that non-Brahmanical society, especially low-

er castes groups, acquired the Sanskrit tradition through recent contact with the Brahmans. But a close examination of the above texts of *mantravāda* shows that Sanskrit traditions were formed in the medieval period. There are indications in the *Cilappatikāram* about *kālagaṇitar* with Sanskritic traditions. These *kālagaṇitar* are the Kaniyans, who are major figures in *mantravāda kaḷam* today. This study argues that these mantras are Buddhist-hybrid Sanskrit not just by examining the period and content of the texts, but also based on on iconography, colour symbolism, ritual traditions and priesthood of Tantric Buddhism that exist widely in *kaḷameḻuttŭ*.

This hybrid style of Sanskrit was widely popular in Kerala and South India during the medieval period. As in the *mantravāda* scriptures, it is also prevalent in the *Maṇipravāḷa* literatures. We have already seen that the content of those works is basically related to Tantric Buddhism. Scholars have already argued for the connection between *Maṇipravāḷa* language with Prakrit (Nair 1995: 111-170; Arzony 2021: 7-27). The hybrid style of Sanskrit-Tamil or Pali-Tamil had already been developed in Tamil Buddhism in an earlier period. The Vaisnavite commentaries are composed in hybrid style Sanskrit-Tamil. This style of language can also be seen in *Maṇimēkhalai*. The early Mahayana Buddhist sutras such as *Aṣṭasahāsrika Prajñapārāmitā* and *Gaṇḍavyūha* were composed in the Sanskrit-Prakrit hybrid style, which were very popular in Telugu and Canarese countries (Hikosaka 1989: 158-159). The hyms of *kūttu* and *kūṭiyāṭṭam* are also composed in this hybrid style in Kerala. Even in *āṭṭakkathas*, we occasionally chance upon Prakrit stanzas (Nair 1995: 118, 120, 120). From the foregoing discussion, we come to the conclusion that the Buddhist-Hybrid Sanskrit mantras are found in the *kaḷam* of *mantravāda*.

We can see that epigraphic and literary evidences show that Tantric Buddhism was popular in the mountain ranges and coastal regions from the beginning of the medieval period. It is also understood that these Buddhist centres were part of a large trade network connected with Tibet, China, Sri Lanka and other Buddhist countries. We have seen that the religious world of Tantric Buddhism as attested in medieval inscriptions and literature continues to this day almost unchanged in the world of non-Brahmanical rituals in Kerala. We have also seen that the iconographic features of *maithuna*-ferocious deities, the *vāmācāra-vīrācāra*

style of deity worships, the nature of rituals, the female principles and the importance of mantra-*yantra*s based on hybrid Sanskrit style in *kaḷameḻuttŭ* are all part of Tantric Buddhist *maṇḍala* worship (see the table below). These *maṇḍala* cults, which existed from the beginning of the medieval period, began to be Brahmanised at some point, and by the late medieval period it had become fully Brahmanical pantheons. Its history has to be examined now.

Table: Locating Tantric Buddhism in the Tradition of *Kaḷameḻuttŭ* in Medeival Kerala

SL. NO.	*KAḶAMEḺUTTŬ*	TANTRIC BUDDHISM	EVIDENCES FROM MEDIEVAL SOUTH INDIA, KERALA AND INDIAN SUBCONTINENT
The *Maṇḍala* Iconography and Ritual Context of Tantric Buddhism in *Kaḷameḻuttŭ*			
1	*Maṇḍala* or *kaḷam* worship of making anthropomorphic figures of deities, using five coloured powders	Tantric Buddhist *maṇḍala* worship of making anthropomorphic figures of deities, using five-coloured powders	Buddhist Tantras *Cilappatikāram*
2	Preparing the *maṇḍala* ground with cow-dung, making the borders of deity figures with white powder	Preparing the *maṇḍala* ground with cow-dung, making the borders of deity figures with white powder	Buddhist Tantras *Cilappatikāram*

3	Chants, *mudras* and dances are performed to praise *maṇḍala/kaḷam* deities accompanying music and *stutis* of *dēvatas*	Chants, *mudras* and dances are performed to praise Tantric Buddhist *maṇḍala* deities accompanying music of *pañca-tāḷa* and *stutis* of *dēvatas*	*Cilappatikāram* *Vaññēri Granthavari* *Kūṭaḷi Granthavari* *Koḻikkōtaṉ Granthavari*
4	The priest offers *pañca-makāras* to the *maṇḍala/kaḷam* deities: beans, liquor, meat, blood etc. are offered during *bali*	The priest offers *pañca-makāras* to the Tantric Buddhist maṇḍala deities as *vāmācāra* and *Vīrācāra*: dark-coloured beans, liquor, meat, blood etc. are offered during *bali*	*Cilappatikāram* *Vaññēri Granthavari* *Kūṭaḷi Granthavari* *Koḻikkōtaṉ Granthavari*
5	*Maṇḍala/kaḷam* deities worshiped in *kāvŭs* and *kōṭṭas*	*Maṇḍala* worship at secret and isolated places *Tāra* Bhagavati worshiped in *kāvŭs*	*Cilappatikāram* *Vaññēri Granthavari* *Kūṭaḷi Granthavari* *Koḻikkōtaṉ Granthavari*
6	As the priest/priestess enters the *maṇḍala/kaḷam*, he/she becomes the deity in mind and body.	As the priest/priestess enters the Tantric Buddhist *maṇḍala*, he/she becomes the deity in mind and body: the adept's self consecration in which the adept visualises his or her body (*kāyamaṇḍala*) as a *maṇḍala* deity	Buddhist Tantras Sangam Texts

Sacred-sex and Ferocious Form of Bhagavati of Tantric Buddhism in the Iconography of *Kaḷameḻuttŭ*			
7	Bhagavati	*Tāra* Bhagavati, *Vajravārāhī*	Buddhist Tantras Medieval South Indian/Kerala Inscriptions *Cilappatikāram* *Maṇimēkhalai*
8	*Maṇḍala* worship	Tantric Buddhist *maṇḍala* worship	Buddhist Tantras *Cilappatikāram*
9	*Maithuna* and ferocious nature of the Bhagavati	*Maithuna* and ferocious nature of the *Tāra* Bhagavati, *Vajravārāhī*	Buddhist Tantras *Cilappatikāram* *Maṇimēkhalai*
10	*Maithuna maṇḍala* of Bhagavati: she is worshiped in the sexual posture *ara-maṇḍala*. A male phallus descending into Bhagavati's vaginal canal. *Kēśādipādavarṇana*: *maithuna* praising *Ammaṇa-chāya*: *maithuna* praising Divine couple: *Bhagavatiyum Nṛttagōpālanum* and *Vairajātanum Bhagavatiyum*	The divine couple in the Tantric Buddhist *maṇḍala*s always leads in sexual embrace such as Buddha and his consort Tara, *Vajravārahi* and so forth. *Śabarōtsava* of Bhagavati in Bengal included songs about sex organs and also about sexual intercourse with requisite movements of the body. Sexual imagery is considered as a metaphor for enlightenment through the qualities of unity and completion	Buddhist Tantras

11	Bhagavati is symbolised as the peak form of wrath. Bhagavati has forms with two, four, six, eight and sixteen arms. War goddess destroys the powers of enemies. Human head in the right hand, *khadga, khetaka, pātra and kapāla,* sword, *śūlam, vaṭṭaka, khatvaṅkam, maṇi, paras, kapāla* and axe	The deity *Tāra* Bhagavati and her manifestations symbolised as the peak form of wrath *Tāra* Bhagavati has forms with two, four, six, eight and sixteen arms War goddess destroys the powers of enemies. The deity *Tāra* and her manifestation of *Vajravārāhī* have garlands of heads hanging from their necks, when two armed holds a knife and skull cup, arrow and sword in two right hands and bow and skull in the two left when four handed; she carries sword, arrow, thunderbolt and knife in her four right hands and bow, lotus, axe and skull in her four left hands when eight armed	Buddhist Tantras Medieval Kerala Inscriptions *Cilappatikāram* The cult of *Tāra* Bhagavati was popular in Konkan region and Kadri.
12	*Kaṇṇaki* or *Maṇimēgha* as sea goddess	Sea goddesses consisting of *Maṇimēkhalai, Tāra* and Kaṇṇaki who were protectors of the trade of south Indian coast.	*Cilappatikāram* *Maṇimēkhalai*

Ayyappan and Cāttaṉ of Tantric Buddhism in the Iconography of *Kaḷameḻuttŭ*			
13	Ayyappan	*Ayyanāyake* and *Avalōkitēśvara*	Buddhist Tantras Medieval Inscriptions *Keraḷotpatti* *Granthavari*
14	Sastan	Cāttaṉ, *pāṣaṇḍa bhairavanām* Cāttaṉ	Medieval Inscriptions *Cilappatikāram*
15	Cāttaṉ	*Pāṣaṇḍa bhairavanām* Cāttaṉ	Medieval Inscriptions, *Cilappatikāram*
The deity Vairōcanan of Tantric Buddhism in the iconography of *Kaḷameḻuttŭ*			
16	*Vairajātan*	*Vairōcanan*	Buddhist Tantras *Mūṣakavaṁśakāvya* *Vairōcanan* is worshiped on the Konkan coast and Mangalore
17	*Vairajātan* was born from the seed syllable '*ōm*'	*Vairōcana*'s forehead is represented the seed syllable '*ōm*'	*Mūṣakavaṁśakāvya* *Vairōcanan* is worshiped on the Konkan coast and Mangalore
18	*Vairajātan* is white in colour	*Vairōcanan* is white in colour	*Mūṣakavaṁśakāvya* *Vairōcanan* is worshiped in Konkan coast and Mangalore

19	*Vairajātan* means one who is born from *vaira* or *vajra*	*Vairōcanan* means one who is born from *vaira* or *vajra*	*Mūṣakavaṁśakāvya* *Vairōcanan* is worshiped in Konkan coast and Mangalore
20	*Kaḷam* of *Vairajātan* and his consort Bhagavati	*Maṇḍala* of *Vairōcanan* and his consort *Tāra* Bhagavati	*Mūṣakavaṁśakāvya* *Vairōcanan* is worshiped in Konkan coast and Mangalore
Colour Symbolism of Tantric Buddhism in the *Kaḷameḻuttŭ*			
21	Powders of *pañca-varnas* used to make the *kaḷam* of the deities	Powders of *pañca-varnas* used to make the *maṇḍala* of the deities	*Cilappatikāram* *Vaññēri Granthavari* *Kūṭaḷi Granthavari*
22	*Pañca-varnas*	*Maṇḍala* deities in Tantric Buddhism are symbolised through these five colours. *Vairōcana*: White - Delusion *Ratnasambava*: Yellow - Pride *Akṣōbhya*: Blue - Hatred *Amitābha* : Red - Passion *Amoghasiddhi*: Green – Envy	Buddhist Tantras
23	*Vairajātan* is white in colour	*Vairōcanan* is white in colour	*Mūṣakavaṁśakāvya* Konkan coast and Mangalore

24	Dominant colour of red in the Bhagavati's *kaḷam*	Red colour symbolises the essence female principles in Tanric Buddhism	Buddhist Tantras
25	Yellow Bhagavati	Yellow Tara	Buddhist Tantras
26	Green Bhagavati	Green Tara	Buddhist Tantras
The *Yogini* Traditions and *Nagam* worship of Tantric Buddhism in the *Kaḷameḻuttŭ*			
27	*Nagam* worship is *maṇḍala* worship	Tantric Buddhist *maṇḍala* worship	Buddhist Tantra *Vaññēri Granthavari*
28	Female priests in Naga's kaḷam	Female priests of Yōginis in Tantric Buddhist maṇḍala	Buddhist Tantra *Vaññēri Granthavari*
29	Female priests: *Nāgayakṣis, Yakṣiyammamar, Nāgakanyaka, Nāgarājnī, Yakṣikanyaka, Kanyaka, Mātaṅgi,* etc. Yoginis or women with religioua attributes	Tantric Buddhist Yoginis described as *Dākini, Yakṣikanya, Nagarājni, Kanyaka, Yakṣini* and *Mātaṅgi* who are also known as *Guhyaka*	Buddhist Tantra *Cilappatikāram* *Maṇimēkhalai* Medieval Inscriptions *Maṇipravāḷa* texts
30	*Nāgakkaḷam*: sexual union of two hideous snakes symbolically represents sexual union of the deities *Nagarāja* and *Nagarājnī*	The sacred sexual union of *Yogin*s and *Yogini*s in Tantric Buddhist *maṇḍala*	Buddhist Tantras

31	The priest turns into the deity as he or she enters the *kaḷam*, and gives orders, conveys the deity's wishes, and performs the ritual dance.	It is held that while the *Yogins* and *Yoginis* enters the *maṇḍala*, perform the ritual dance and they are transformed into the deity.	Buddhist Tantras
32	*Nāgakkaḷam*: *Vinata* and *Kadru* as *vēśa* or *vēśaṉmār*	*Yoginis* in Tantric Buddhist *maṇḍala*	*Cilappatikāram* *Maṇipravāḷa* texts
33	*Yakṣini* and *Mātaṅgi*	*Yakṣini* and *Mātaṅgi*: *Yōginis* in Tantric Buddhism	Buddhist Tantras *Cilappatikāram* *Maṇimēkhalai* *Maṇipravāḷa* texts
Locating Buddhist-Hybrid Sanskrit *Mantras* and Tantric Buddhist Healing Traditions in the Contexts of *Mantravādakkaḷam*			
34	Sacred healing in *Mantravādakkaḷam*	Sacred healing in Tantric Buddhism	Buddhist Tantras *Mantravāda* palm leaf manuscripts
35	Priest (*mantravādi*) as healer with extra-human power	Tantric Buddhist Priest (*ācāri*) as healer with extra-human power	Buddhist Tantras *Mantravāda* palm leaf manuscripts
36	It is believed that neurotic diseases like epilepsy affects the human body due to the attack of the deities and if the deities are appeased by *mantravāda* the disease will be removed from the body and the disease will be cured.	It is believed that neurotic diseases like epilepsy affect human body due to the attack of the deities and if the deities are appeased by Tantric Buddhist rituals, the disease will be removed from the body and the disease will be cured.	Buddhist Tantras *Mantravāda* palm leaf manuscripts

37	The mantras are chanted in ritual performances of the symbolic diagrams. These are brief forms of praises or syllables of the deity.	The mantras are chanted in Tantric Buddhist ritual performances of the symbolic diagrams. These are brief forms of praises or syllables of the deity.	Buddhist Tantras *Mantravāda* palm leaf manuscripts
38	The mantras of *uccāṭana, vidvēṣaṇa, ākarṣana, māraṇa and vaśīkaraṇa*	The mantras for *sthambhana, māraṇa, uccāṭana, ākarṣaṇa*, and *vidvēṣaṇa* of *ābhicāra* belong to the mantra of Yama in Tantric Buddhism. Buddhist tantric adepts perform six *abhicāra* rites and mantras to attain the desired *siddhi*. These are *māraṇa, uccāṭana, stambhana, ākarṣaṇa, aśīkaraṇa* and *śāntika*.	Buddhist Tantras *Mantravāda* palm leaf manuscripts
39	Mantras - Hybrid Sanskrit: consist of Malayalam and Sanskrit terms	Buddhist-Hybrid Sanskrit: a hybrid language of Sanskrit and vernacular languages	Buddhist Tantras *Mantravāda* palm leaf manuscripts *Maṇipravāḷa* texts
40	The mantra for protecting others, for obtaining control over women, for control over all the *Yakṣa*s and divinities	The Tantric Buddhist mantra for protecting others, for obtaining control over women, for control over all the *Yakṣa*s and divinities	Buddhist Tantras *Mantravāda* palm leaf manuscripts

41	The mantra for suppressing one's, mental disorders and other illnesses. *Bali* mantras for killing enemy, protection from *prēta* spirits, suppressing one's speech and so on.	The Tantric Buddhist mantra for suppressing one's mental disorders and other illnesses. *Bali* mantras for killing enemy, protection from *prēta* spirits, suppressing one's speech and so on.	Buddhist Tantras *Mantravāda* palm leaf manuscripts
42	During the *kaḷameḻuttŭ*, the healer usually draws the *kaḷam* of *Gandharvan, Bhairavan, Guḷikan, Yakṣan,- Triśūlini* and so on.	During the Tantric Buddhist ritual context, the ritual healer usually draws the Tantric Buddhist *maṇḍala* of deities	Buddhist Tantras *Mantravāda* palm leaf manuscripts
43	The healer offers sacrificial flesh of animals, toddy and seeds to the *kaḷam*.	The Tantric Buddhist healer offers *pañca-makāra*s to the *maṇḍala*.	Buddhist Tantras *Cilappatikāram* *Mantravāda* palm leaf manuscripts Koḻikkōtaṉ Granthavari
44	In the case of *mantravādakkaḷam, brānti* or mental disorder is caused by the attack of Cāttaṉ	*Brānti* or mental disorder is caused by the attack of deity. The of *ābhicāra* rites of *bhrānti* (creating madness), can be seen in the Tantric Buddhism.	Buddhist Tantras *Mantravāda* palm leaf manuscripts

Source: Information gathered by the author

III. MEDIEVAL TRANSFORMATIONS: *KAḶAMEḺUTTŬ* IN THE CONFIGURATION OF THE BRAHMANICAL PANTHEON

The previous section examined the antecedents of *kaḷameḻuttŭ* in the Mahayana and Tantric Buddhist traditions in early medieval Tamilakam. The present section argues that *kaḷameḻuttŭ* was deeply rooted in Tantric Buddhism and that it was appropriated by medieval Brahmanical religion. Six forms of Brahmanical appropriations in *kaḷameḻuttŭ* in the medieval period are taken up for discussion here. These are the Brahmanical re-configuration of *kaḷameḻuttŭ* in 1) the Brahmanical Tantras, the forms of 2) Bhagavati; 3) Ayyappan and Cāttan̲, 4) Naga, 5) in the domain of the priests, and 6) in the form of the *mantravādakkaḷam*. The argument is that the Brahmanical Tantras appropriated the *mantras*, *yantras* and deities of Tantric Buddhism, and the ferocious and *maithuna* forms of Tantric Buddhist *maṇḍala* deities such as Bhagavati, Ayyappan, Cāttan̲ and Nagam underwent transformation and became part of the Brahmanical pantheon. The study argues that the non-Brahmanical priests of *kaḷameḻuttŭ* seen today have been re-configured by Brahmanical religion in medieval Kerala. The *mantravādakkaḷam* of lower caste populations also converged with the Brahmanical religion as the lowest strata in the medieval social milieu of Kerala. The Brahmanical religion that developed from the Saiva-Vaisnava movements incorporated surrounding Buddhist traditions, making them a part of Brahmanical religion. This incorporation by Brahmanical religion is discussed below.

The development of the Saiva-Vaisnava movement is a major factor contributing to the decline of Buddhism in south India. In Tamilakam, Buddhism was mainly the religion of the merchant class and the flourishing circumstances of inland and overland trade helped its growth. However, during the medieval period agrarian communities emerged as powerful groups with the royal support of Cholas. These people embraced mainly Saiva-Vaisnava cult of their rulers. In the Kerala region too, the expansion of Puranic religion was essentially linked with the bhakti of Saivism and Vaisnavism. (Champakalakshmi 2012: 77, 442-457; Subbarayalu 2012: 46-158, 20, 209).

The emerging bhakti elements can also be seen in the Chera inscriptions. It has been mentioned that the temple servants are employed for reading the *Mahabharata* and for dancing Ramayanam *kuttus*. Puranic stories adopted the *kūttu* (Nair 1992: 95-97, 379, 404) and other ritual dances of Buddhism (Nair 1989: 119) in the medieval period. The Puranic performances of *Banāsuravadham* and *Ramāyaṇam* in *kūttu* by *Cākyan* and women is described in the early medieval accounts of Tamilakam (Nair 1992: 95-97, 379, 404). It is noteworthy that the Tiruvalla temple record mentions *kāḷiyaṅkam kūttu*. *Kāḷiyaṅkam* is the fourth act of the Sanskrit play called *Bālacarita* which shows the Vaisnava appropriation in Tiruvalla temple. The Chola inscriptions refer to *Cākkaimār* and payment of *nṛtyabhoga* to them in terms of *cākkai kaṇi* land by way of remuneration for their *āriyakkūttu* performance (Narayanan 1996: 194). In this way, *Cākyamuni*, the *nirmaṇakāya* of the Buddha, becomes a propagator of Brahmanical religion in the medieval temples of Kerala. *Cākya-bhikṣu*, who propagated Buddha Dharma, was Brahmanised in the medieval period as a propagator of Puranas. The process of Brahmanisation of *Cākyan* is also mentioned in *Periyapuranam*. The Saiva text explains that the Buddhist monk was converted to *Cākya Nāyanār* (Balambal 1998: 34, 37; Champakalakshmi 1998: 90).

As a result of Saiva-Vaisnava bhakti that grew up everywhere in Tamilakam, *kaḷameḻuttŭ* was also Brahmanaised in Kerala. It does not mean that Bhagavati, Ayyappan, Cāttaṉ and Nagam entered the structural temples of Brahmans and became Siva and Visnu. They continue outside the Brahmanical structural temples but are transformed into Saiva and Puranic forms. Since *kaḷameḻuttŭ* circulated in the Tantric tradition of Buddhism, it has mostly been appropriated by Saivism. Now let us examine the historical process of transformation of ferocious and sacred-sex forms of Tantric Buddhist *maṇḍala* deities and Vajrayana ritual traditions into Brahmanical forms in medieval Kerala.

III.a. Brahmanic Re-configuration of *Kaḷameḻuttŭ* in the Brahmanical Tantras

We know that Mahayana Buddhism gave a lot of space to *avarṇa* customs, rituals and deities. Thus, when Mahayana Buddhism started to become a widely popular religion in India among all sections of people,

Brahmanism started writing Tantras, leaving behind the *Vedas*, *Smṛtis* and *Śastras*. Brahmanism ventured to write Brahmana Tantras by abandoning Vedic-sastra-smruti texts to prevent people's entry into Mahayana Buddhism.[29]

It is in this way that Brahmanical religion began to address the spiritual life of the common people. Brahmanical Tantras did not create new deities in new cults. Instead, the practice of appropriating deities and cults from Mahayana Buddhism was widely adopted.

We can see that many references to Brahmanical Tantras are adopted from the Buddhist Tantras. The *Śrīvidyārṇava-tantra*, *Gandharva-tantra* and *Mantramahodadhi* by Mahidhara adopts the worship of the Buddha and Tantric Buddhist goddesses such as Tara, *Mātaṅgi, Caṇḍamātṅgi,* and others as part of the Brahmanical pantheon (Buhnemann 1999: 304, 329). The Brahmanical Tantras such as *Tan-*

29 Buddha primarily addressed the spiritual lives of the upper castes, including the Brahmans, Kṣatriyas, Grahapatis and Śramaṇas (Krishan 1986: 71-77). Mahayana Buddhism, however, focused on the religious practices of the Avarṇas. By the Ist century BC, Mahayana began to expand, incorporating the rituals of Avarṇas, which gained significant popularity. As Mahayana evolved, it became widespread across the Indian subcontinent, branching into forms such as Tantrayana, Mantrayana, Vajrayana and so on, which emphasized rituals, mantras, and secret **maithuna** worship. These developments contributed to the emergence of what became known as popular Buddhism. By the 9th or 10th century, this popular form of Buddhism had become prominent in regions including Kerala and other parts of south India. During this period, the Brahmanical religion, which centered on the *Vedic*-sastra-smriti texts, observed that the Avarṇa communities were increasingly aligning with Buddhist religious practices. In response, Brahmanical religious systems began composing sacred texts aimed at integrating the Avarṇas into their system. These sacred texts, referred to as 'Brahmana Tantras', marked the beginning of significant developments in Brahmanical tantric literature. Texts such as *Prapantasāra, Īśānagurudēvapaddhati, Śāradatilaka, Śrīvidyārṇavatantra, Tantrasāra, Tantrasārasamgraha, Tantrasamuccaya, Śēṣasamuccaya* and so on serve as examples of Brahmana Tantras. The Brahmana Tantras assimilated Tantric Buddhist deities and mantras, creating a syncretic religious framework (Bhattacharya 1978: 13-14; Buhnemann 1999: 303, 304, 314, 327, 329. These works illustrate how Tantric Buddhist religious systems were seamlessly blended into Brahmanical traditions, creating a syncretic religious framework that incorporated elements of both cultures (Ibid.).

trasārasaṁgraha and the *Mantrapāda* of the *Īśānagurudēvapaddhati* borrowed the *ābhicāra* rites, *mantras* and deities from Tantric Buddhism (Buhnemann 1999: 303-304). And further, the *Candasidhara-mantra* for the destruction of *Piśācas*, the *Vajragandhari-mantra* for protection from *Piśācas* and fever, other *mantras* against fever, accompanying a sacrificial offering, and to protect cattle, which are described in these Brahmanical Tantras, are borrowed from Tantric Buddhist sources (Buhnemann 1999: 327). The *mantras* practiced by lower castes in the *mantravādakkaḷam* as part of the Tantric Buddhist tradition, are thus included in Brahmanical Tantras such as *Tantrasārasaṁgraha* and *Īśānagurudēvapaddhati*. This is the history of the transmission of this Sanskrit *mantra* tradition to lower caste people and Brahmans alike.

Brahmanical chronicles do not adopt the *maṇḍalas* of anthropomorphic deities from the Buddhist Tantras, although there have been many other borrowings from the Buddhist Tantras. It may be noted that the idea of the *maṇḍala* deity was developed by the Buddhists. It is mostly associated with *maithuna* worship. Therefore, the Brahmanical Tantric texts which borrowed the symbolic diagrams of *maṇḍalas* and the symbolic rites of *mudras* and *mantras* from the Buddhist tantric literature, discarded the sexual rituals, *pañca-makaras*, etc. *Saundaryalahari*, *Prapañcasāram*, *Prayōgamañjari*, *Viṣṇusaṁhita*, *Īśānagurudēvapaddati*, *Tantrasamuccaya,* etc. also describe the tradition of symbolic diagrams. Their emergence can be seen in the north Indian Vaisnava and Saiva texts in medieval period (Gaeffke 1987: 153-155). These also does not include anthropomorphic *maṇḍala* deities.

The late medieval literary works, especially the *Kēraḷōtpatti*, also provides primary evidence for the Brahmanical incorporation of the pre-Brahmanical deities, which are the main deities propitiated in *kaḷameḻuttŭ*. Something significant that we come across in the *Kēraḷōtpatti Granthavari* is that Parasurama has not appointed the Tantra tradition to anyone in the sixty-four Brahman villages (Varier 1984: 4). Colonial surveys suggest that Brahmans be regarded as 'pure' Aryans who practice 'higher' forms of worship according to Vedic, Puranic, Smarta and Sastric traditions (Iyer, Vol. II, P. 354). Furthermore, they suggest

that Kerala Brahmins[30] are mixed with Dravidians (i.e., lower castes). They argue that this is how Kerala Brahmans follow the Tantric worship of lower castes, which is a 'lower' form of worship. Therefore, groups like the *Nampūtiripāṭūs* of *Kallūr*, *Kāṭṭumāṭam* and *Cēnnamaṅgalam* became followers of Tantric practices (Iyer 1981: I 85; Iyer 1981: III 354). It is possible to argue that the Tantra tradition till the late medieval period was clearly associated with non-Brahmanic religious tradition and that it was part of Tantric Buddhist systems.

Kēraḷōtpatti says that Parasurama had appointed twelve families in Brahmanical villages for appropriating the non-Brahmanic deities in Malabar. Among these twelve families, six are appointed to serve the *durmantra* (*mantras* for serving evil deities) for converging *durdēvatas*, being early mountain deities. The remaining six are responsible for *sanmantra* (*mantras* serving for good deities) for appropriating *jaladēvatas* (sea goddesses), being early coastal deities. *Mūssatŭ*, *Iḷayatŭ*, and *Nampyātiri* caste groups are appointed for this purpose (Varier 1984: 3-5). It is very significant that *Kēraḷōtpatti* says these groups were not Vedic Brahmans and they did not possess right of Vedic rituals (Varier 1984: 4). They are also known as 'degraded' Brahmans. It is indicated that these people might belong to the non-Brahmanic priests and pre-Brahmanic settlers in Kerala. It is possible to suggest that the Brahmanic ritual oligarchy compelled them to transform their non-Brahmanic religious traditions into the ways of Brahmanical religion.

It is very significant that the Brahmanical chronicles do not refer to the *kaḷameḻuttŭ* of Bhagavati, Ayyappan, Nagam, Cāttan̲, Vettakkarumakan and so on. However, in the present times, Brahmana people worship these deities as patron deities and even conduct the rites of *kaḷameḻuttŭ* in their own houses. It is very interesting to note that the twelve Brahmana families mentioned in the *Kēraḷōtpatti* have become

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30 Kerala Brahmins are generally divided into two groups: Vedic Brahmins and Non-Vedic Brahmins. Only Vedic Brahmins have the privilege to perform Vedic rituals and study Vedic literature. Non-Vedic Brahmins are known as degraded Brahmans. Mussat, Astavaidyas, Ilayatu, Nampi, Cattirar and so on are all considered as degraded Brahmans (Menon 1995: 251-254). They have traditions in medicine, Tantra and military practices. Vedic Brahmans are known as Nampootiris. Some scholars argue that they are Arya Brahmans of 'pure Aryan descent' (Logan 2000: 119).

major Tantric Brahmans in modern Kerala. We may also note that Vedic Brahmans too have begun worshipping these non-Brahmanical deities in modern times.

III.b. The Brahmanical Re-configuration of Bhagavati

One of the most important deities whose Brahmanisation took place in the most obvious manner is Bhagavati. The cult of the Buddhist tradition of Bhagavati was transformed into a Saiva form, and she came to be known as *Mahākāḷi*, and later as *Bhadrakāḷi*. Prominent Buddhist scholars such as B Bhattacharya argue that the 'Hindu' pantheon, including *Kāḷi*, evolved from the Buddhist pantheon (Bhattacharya 1930: 1286). He further argues that the eight manifestations of Tara, known as *Kāḷi* and *Bhadrakāḷi* in the Brahmanical pantheon, are borrowed from Tantric Buddhist deities (Bhattacharya 1978: 13-14; Buhnemann 1999: 303, 304). *Tāra* represents some characteristics of the Durga and *Caṇḍi* aspects of the Brahmanical *Devi*. We have already seen that the deity *Maṇimēkhalai* has influenced the concept of Bhagavati in *kaḷameḻuttŭ*. During the *bhakti* period, *Maṇimēkhalai* (or *Maṇimaṅka*) gained association with *Kāḷi*.

During the medieval period of *bhakti*, Kaṇṇaki in *kaḷameḻuttŭ* also got associated with the Saiva form of *Kāḷi*.[31] This kind of Saiva appropriation of Bhagavati is done through the hyms of *Dēvīmahātmyam*, *Bhadrōtpatti-kiḷippāṭṭŭ* and *Dārikavadham* in late medieval Kerala.[32] *Bhadrōtpatti-kiḷippāṭṭu* and *Dārikavadham* hymns became *bhakti* hymns during its Brahmanaisation phase. The *Cilappatikāram* hymn used to be sung in *Bhagavatikkaḷam* performances. It is called the '*Maṇimaṅka* hymn' in this *kaḷam*.[33] A close look at this hymn very clearly shows the process of transforming Bhagavati into *Bhadrakali*. Kaṇṇaki's wrath against the Pandya king in *Cilappatikāram* is transformed into *Bhadrakali*'s wrath.[34] There is a sacred procession of

31 For the ritual song of Bhagavati, see Mundekkadu 2000: 125-126

32 For the ritual song of *Dārikavadham*, Mundekkadu 2000: 147-174.

33 For the *Maṇimaṅka* hymn, see Unni and Sarma 2001: 132-169.

34 See fifth *padam* of the Maṇimaṅka hymn (Unni and Sarma 2001: 132-169).

Maṇimanka into Madurai to kill the Pandya king.[35] This appears to be repeated in *Bhadrakāḷi*'s procession to kill *Dārika*.[36] In the lines of the hymn, the description about *Paṇḍya-vadham* (in *Cilappatikāram*) is identical with that of *Dārika-vadham.* The image of *Dārika* is not found represented anywhere in the Puranic traditions, and the myth of the *Dārika-vadham* behind the Bhagavati cult probably emerged in a later period. The *Bhadrōtpatti-kiḷippāṭṭu* is also formed on the basis of *Dārika-vadham*. Both these texts praise the worship of Siva. Thus, we may see that deities such as Kannaki and *Maṇimēkhalai* get associated with the cult of *Kāḷi* in the late medieval period (Shibi 2016: 269; Induchudan 1969: 173, 174).

It should be assumed that major changes in the iconography of Bhagavati in *kaḷameḻuttŭ* have come after Brahmanisation. We have seen that *maṇḍala* worship of couples was very important in Tantric Buddhism. However, when the consort is drawn with Bhagavati in *kaḷameḻuttŭ*, it is not drawn in the *maithuna* form. Bhagavati and her consort appear as couples who are face-to-face with the devotees. But the *maithuna* form of Bhagavati in the Tantric Buddhist maṇḍala is not completely rejected. That is why Bhagavati is depicted in the *aramaṇḍala* posture, a pose that facilitates sexual activity. Bhagavati's *maithuna* form is symbolically transformed in the form of erecting a phallus between her spread thighs. This phallus does not belong to the male deity who is her consort. The phallus tip is drawn in such a way that it does not seem to be part of the *kaḷam*. It is drawn directly below the the deity's navel (Ibid: 102, 103) . These developments were part of the Brahmanisation of the Bhagavati *kaḷam*. When sex rituals were symbolised, Bhagavati's *maithuna* form too was symbolised and Brahmanised this way.

We have seen above that ferocious deities were very important in the Tantric Buddhist *maṇḍala*. We also noted that the ferocious deities protect the devotees from difficulties and challenges. The weapons of these ferocious deities determine the nature of the deities in *kaḷameḻuttŭ*. We saw that the iconography of *Vajravārāhī*, the manifestation of *Tāra*

35 See the first to fifth *padam* of the *Maṇimaṅka* hymn (Unni and Sarma 2001: 132-169).

36 For the ritual song, Mundekkadu 2000: 147-174.

Bhagavati, determines the nature of Bhagavati's weapons in *kaḷameḻuttŭ*. Among the weapons in *Vajravārāhī*'s hand, the human head is very important. The ferocious *Vajravārāhī* holding a severed head, can be seen in Buddhist countries. The severed human head in *Vajravārāhī's* hand was imagined as *Dārika*'s head when it was drawn in the Bhagavati *kaḷam*. We have already seen above the process of Brahmanising Bhagavati into the Saiva form of *Kāli*.

Another important change brought about by Brahmanisation was the removal of women priestess from the *maṇḍala* worship of Bhagavati. Brahmanical religion followed principles that view the presence of women as impure for a sacred site. Therefore, when the *maṇḍala* worship of Bhagavati was Brahmanised, female priesthood that prevailed in Tantric Buddhism was completely removed. This is the reason why we do not see women holding priesthood in any context of Bhagavati worship, with the notable exception of the Kodungallur temple. But in Bhagavati worship, the male priest performs the priesthood by growing his hair long and dressed like a woman, and even imagining himself as a woman. In Tantric Buddhist *maṇḍala*s, the sex ritual performed by men and women together was transformed to be performed by the male priest (in the disguise of woman) alone, perhaps after the Brahmanisation. Anyway, it is clear that women's participation in religion completely disappeared with Brahmanisation.

III.c. The Brahmanical Re-configuration of Ayyappan and Cāttaṉ

The deities Ayyappan and Cāttaṉ are transformed and inserted into the Saiva pantheon and Puranic stories in the medieval period. As we have seen Bodhisattva *Avalōkitēśvara* had been worshipped in the Western Ghats. However, the importance of the Western Ghats as a sacred place of Tantric Buddhism was gradually lost, and *Avalōkitēśvara* and his consort *Tāra* became associated with the Brahmanical deities Siva and Uma (Hikosaka 1989: 194). During the period of *bhakti*, the sacred site of *Avalōkitēśvara* became a site for *Agastiyār*. It is possible that such a synthesis of has happened in the Potia mountain, which is sacred for both Buddhists and the Hindus (Ibid: 191).

According to *Kēraḷōtpatti* tradition, the deities who existed earlier on the Western Ghats were called *durdevatas*. The tradition also says that those deities were appropriated and worshiped as Ayyappan or Śāsta. We have also seen that the *Avalōkitēśvara-Tāra* cult was active the Western Ghats. It should be understood that it was *Avalōkitēśvara* who was appropriated as Śāsta or Ayyappan. The same Buddhist works that we saw above record that Potia mountain, which was the location of an *Avalōkitēśvara-Tāra* cult, became a Saiva centre. We understand Ayyappan to be a Saiva form. It must be assumed that Avalōkitēśvara's tantric *maṇḍala* was Brahmanised as *Ayyappan-kaḷam*. This is why the kaḷam is today called *maṇḍala* worship.

Ayyappan and Bhagavati are often seen sharing the same sacred site. But both these deities are separated in most of the places and worshiped in two abodes. They may have been worshiped as divine couples. Later, they might have been relocated separately to two different dwellings within the same complex. The worship of both is commonly known as '*maṇḍala* worship'. From this, it may be concluded that Bhagavati could be Ayyappan's consort. But both are worshiped under the common name of maṇḍala worship. Ayyappan and Bhagavati may have once been depicted in a single *kaḷam*. When they were Brahmanised as Saiva forms, they moved into two different realms. However, we can also understand that the same Tantric Buddhist *maṇḍala* worship continued in two places.

The Brahmanisation of the Ayyappan form seems to be recorded quite openly in a record from the 12th century. The Guhanathaswamy inscription says that Ayyappa is an Aryanised form of Cāttaṉ (Rao 1988: 246; Poduval 1990: 76). The hymns of Ayyappan also seem to represent a transition from a mountain deity to a crystallised Puranic Siva. Ayyappa and the *Bhūtanāthan* form of Siva converged during the medieval era in Kerala. *Kēraḷōtpatti* mentions Ayyappan as an important form of Siva. The story of the birth of Ayyanāyake and Ayyanār were also associated with the stories of Siva, the demon Banasura and Mohini the beautiful enchantress form of Visnu (Bastin 2002: 151) during the medieval period. The *nāṭuvāḻi svarūpams* Kerala worshipped this Brahmanised

form of Ayyappan as a war deity. *Kōlikkōṭan Granthavari* records the Zamorins' patronage of Ayyappan-kaḷam (*tīyyāṭṭŭ tuḷḷal*) in north Kerala (Namboothiri 1987: 167, 231).

It is obvious that the term Śāsta is the Aryanised form of Cāttan̲. *Kēraḷōtpatti* says Cāttan̲ is a Saiva deity (Gundert 1868: 108). The hymns of Cāttan̲ tell the story of a Paraya lady who birthed many Cāttan̲s out of sexual contact with Siva. Besides the Guhanathaswamy temple (in Kanyakumari distrinct), the Sastamangalam inscription (Ayyer 2004a: 134), Sastakottam inscription (Changanassery) (*Ibid*: 135), an inscription in the Kunnusalai temple (*Ibid*: 88), and an inscription of Sattankulangara (14th century, Chengannur) (Ayyer 2004b: 161) all describe the widespread cult of Brahmanised form of Cāttan̲ worship in Travancore.

III.d. The Brahmanical Re-configuration of Nagam

Compared to other deities in *kaḷameḻuttŭ,* Nagam worship has seen little Brahmanisation. Nagam worship does not have much place in the Brahmanical tantras. Apart from some Puranic references found in the hymns of Nagam *kaḷam*, it can be said that no other Brahmanical appropriation has taken place. That is why women enjoy priesthood in this ritual even today. Although the Yōgini traditions of Tantric Buddhism are symbolic, they continue in the Nagam kaḷam. We have already observed that worship of females like *Nagarājñi*, *Yakṣi*, *Mātaṅgi* and *Kanyaka* still exists in Nagam worship.

However, in the *Kēraḷōtpatti Granthavari*, there are some indications that point towards Brahmanical appropriation. This refers to the expiatory ceremony performed on account of the Brahmanical persecution of the Nagas, who had been the earlier settlers of Kerala prior to Brahmana migration (Varier 1984: 4). This could be an indirect indication of the persecution of Jains and Buddhists, and of the attempts to eliminate Buddha-Jain worship in Kerala (Champakalakshmi 2012: 438-456). The story behind the burning of *khāṇḍava-vanam* in the Mahābhārata is recalled in the Nagam *kaḷam*. Of course, this story also refers to the theme of massacring the Nagas. In any case, Nagam deities and *bhakti* hymns became of Puranic in late medieval Kerala.

Although Puranic forms have entered the space, women and men continue to perform the sacred dance together in the *kaḷam* of *Nāga-Yakṣi* and *Gandharvan*. The *maithuna* worship of the Yōginis and Yōgins may have been removed as it was Brahmanised. The iconography of deities having sexual intercourse was transformed into the symbolic iconography of mating snakes. Thus, *maithuna* worship was Brahmanised in the *Nāgakkaḷam* using symbolic representation.

III.e. The Brahmanical Re-configuration of Priesthood

It appears that the *Nāṭuvāḻi Svarūpams* patronised priests such as *Teyyampāṭikkuṟuppŭs*, *Teyyampātinampyārs* and *Kallāṟṟakkuṟuppŭs* to perform *kaḷameḻuttŭ* worship to praise their political overlordship (Namboothiri 1987: 222, 225, 236; Gundert 1868: 480). *Kūṭāḷi Granthavaris* documented the patronage of *Teyyampātis* in the *Kūṭāḷikkāvŭ* (Kurup 1989: 127-128). The *Koḻikkōṭan Granthavari* also records the Zamorins' patronage of the Bhagavati *kaḷam* and *Tīyyāṭṭŭ*.

Kēraḷōtpatti says that the priests of kaḷameḻuttŭ such as *Teyyampāṭi*, *Tiyyāṭinampi* and so on are included within the Brahmanic religion based on the four *varṇas* (Gundert 1868: 56-58). They are known as *aṁpalavāsis* or *antarāḷas*. It is very clear that these non-Brahmanical priests worship Bhagavati, Ayyappan, Nagam and other deities in their own sacred groves. Only Brahmanas can be priests in the Brahmanical temples, and *aṁpalavāsis* or *antarāḷas* cannot be priests there. *Kēraḷōtpatti* says that these groups are either Brahmans who were degraded or *Śūdras* who were upgraded. They took their place in between the Brahmans and *Śūdras* (Narayanan 1996: 272). As mentioned earlier, *Kēraḷōtpatti* suggests that priests who worship non-Brahman deities are referred to as degraded Brahmans. *Mūssatŭ*, *Iḷayatŭ*, and *Naṁpyātiri* are examples of such degraded Brahmans. Groups like *Potuvāḷ*, *Paṭārar*, *Vāryar*, *Cākyār*, *Naṁpyār*, *Naṅṅyār* are all considered *antāraḷas* (Narayanan 1996: 272). Others like *Pātamūlam* (Ibid: Index A 27; Varier 2012: 28), *Kāntarpikar* (Narayanan 1996: A 43), *Uttiraccāraṇikal*,[37] *Pattiraccāraṇikal*,[38] are also considered to be *antāraḷas*. We have already

37 The Tiruvalla inscription recorded the gift of certain amount of paddy by *Uttiraccāraṇikal* to the *tiruvamṛtŭ*. See Varier 2021: 170.

38 The Tiruvalla inscription records a gift of 10 *paṟa* paddy by the *Pattiraccara-*

seen that *Kāntarpikar*, *Vāryar*, *Cākyār*, *Naṁpyār* and *Naṅṅyār* are all closely related to Buddhist rituals. In Jain records, *Paṭārar* is a Jain ascetic.[39] These groups are traditionally versed in medicine, astronomy and literature (Narayanan 1996: 272). When their Buddhist traditions changed to the Brahmanical religion in the medieval period, they were degraded and transformed into temple employees.

Naṅṅyārs, who were part of Yōgini traditions, also became performers of Puranas in the medieval period. Above, we had observed that there were three types of dancers: *Uttama*, *mādhyama* and *adhama*. These three do not possess equal rights; they are categorised hierarchically. The *uttama* are paid *irunāḻiyuri* of rice as wages. The wages paid to the *madhyama* are lower: they get *irunāli* of rice. *Adhama* have the lowest wages: they get only *nāluri* of rice. The *uttama* dancers must have performed Puranic stories. What did the *madhyama* and *adhama* dancers do in the temples? According to the Manipravala works like *Candrōlsavam*, *Vaiśika-Tantram*, and others, they are the ones who performed tantric dances. As inscriptions and Manipravala literature suggest, this non-Brahmanical or Buddhist tradition, although Brahmanised, has survived into medieval times.

In the temple records the *ampalavāsis* are recorded to be *paṇimakkal* or *kōyil manucar* (Narayanan 1996: Index A 1, 40, 64). The word '*paṇimakkal*' means servants. It is documented in the temple records that a large amount of fine can be levied on *kōyil manucar* (Ibid: Index A 54). Orders controlling temple employees are numerous in the medieval temple inscriptions. The records show that they were attacked, exiled,[40] and killed (Sreejith 2023).

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nikal to the *Tiruviḷakku* in the temple. See Varier 2021: 165.

39 *Araṭṭanemi Paṭārar*, a disciple of a Jain monk, built the statues of Jain deities at Thirucharanam. The document says that a disciple of *Paṭṭini Paṭārar*, a Jain saint, also built a statue of a Jain deity in the Thirucharanam temple. (Rao, 1992: 125-7)

40 The attacks on these temple employees are evident in the inscriptions available in temples like Avittathur, Thripprangodu, Porangattiri, Nedumpuram Tali, Painkannur, and Airanikkulam. (Narayanan 1996: Index A 10, 13, 14, 43; C 22, 35)

Kēraḷōtpatti also mentions the transformation of the non-Brahmanic priests of *kaḷameḻuttŭ* such as *Maṇṇāns*, *Kaṇiyans*, *Tīyyans*, *Puḷḷuvans* and so forth as lower *jātis* in the four *varṇas* of the Brahmanical social composition.

III.f. The Brahmanical Re-configuration of the *Mantravādakkaḷam*

There has been much debate about the Brahmanisation of the religious world of the lower castes, especially regarding their Sanskrit tradition. We have seen that all the deities, rituals and priesthood in kaḷameḻuttŭ were transformed by the Brahmanical religion in medieval times. This is true of the *mantravādakkaḷams* of the lower castes as well.

Groups like *Kaṇiyans*, *Tīyyas*, and *Maṇṇāns* were already involved with Sanskritic traditions of some kind as part of their Tantric Buddhism. Therefore, Brahmanisation took place easily among them. This is how songs like *Bāli-vadham, Kamsa-vadham, Kalyāṇasaugandhikam*, and *Santhānagōpālam*, which are Puranic stories, ended upon the ritual songs of *Kaṇiyans*.[41] Thus non-Brahmanical deities like *Munḍiyan*, *Guḷikan*, *Kuṭṭiccāttan* and *Karuvilli* are recorded as being part of the Saiva pantheon in the *Kēraḷōtpatti Granthavari*.

It was as part of this Brahmanisation that Tantric Buddhist Yōginis, who were the female deities of the lower castes, began to appear as demons in their own scriptures. *Mātaṅgi* and *Dākini* are recorded as demons in medieval period (Nair 1992: 146). Their supreme goddess, *Oṟṟamulacci* (i.e., *Kaṇṇaki*) was also considered demonic in the *mantravāda* texts. The ritual of the *Bhairavan-kaḷam* (Logan 1995: 176), *Mātaṅgi-yantram* and *Aṣṭadaḷam* began to be considered as demonic practices.[42]

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41 KV Chandu Panikkar has studied the ritual songs of the *Kaṇiyans*. Puranic stories form the content of many of these songs. (Panikkar 1936: 28-29, 7-8)

42 Comprehensive studies have been conducted on the ritual traditions of the lower castes. In all of these studies, the religious traditions of the lower castes are not regarded as deity worship. Additionally, all their deities are perceived as devils or monsters. (Lalithambika 2011: 77-78)

The religious expressions of non-Brahmans, especially the forms of worship of the people of the lower castes are generally seen as devil worship, sorcery, folklore, etc. We may see such observations being made from the time of the Portuguese onwards till today. They colonial eye saw the worship of Bhagavati and Cāttan̲ as pre-Christian Satanism. In this way, Ayyappan, Bhagavati and Cāttan̲ were all devils and demons, and the priests who worshiped them - *Peruvannan* and *Malayan* - were recorded as devil dancers and exorcists in colonial documents. As the Aryan-Dravidian theory emerged, the British added the view that these customs were part of Dravidian culture. Such observations can be found in the studies of Gundert, Logan, Achutha Menon, Nagamayya, Ananthakrishna Iyer, Thurston and Rangachari.

The study of folklore came into existence based on these colonial ideas. They began to see non-Brahman life as part of folklore. That is how *kaḷameḻuttŭ*, *teyyam*, *tira*, *muṭiyēṟṟu* and *tīyyāṭṭu* all came to be interpreted as sorcery and exorcism. Folklore studies do not make any inquiry into the ancient and medieval historical roots of these cultural forms.

In the light of historical explorations conducted so far, we can see that the *Kuṟuppŭ* who draws the *kaḷam* is not a 'folk artist' as interpreted by folklore studies. Rather, he is a priest who practices *sādhana* like in Mahayana Buddhism. The *kaḷams* he makes are neither colourful paintings decorated with bold colours, nor modern works of art. It is a form of *maṇḍala* worship.

CONCLUSION

Historical studies of medieval Kerala have been concerned with state, economy and society that had been shaped by Brahmanas. Those studies have based themselves on documents and records centred on Brahmana settlements. But such settlements constituted only twenty percent of peasant settlements in medieval South India. Most of the rest were settlements of non-Brahmana people. Scholars have argued that there was no Buddhism in South India on such bases. We have done in the foregoing a historical exploration of the religious life of non-Brahmanical society. In fact, the sources examined are the same historical records used to establish the Brahmanical religion. However, we submit that what emerges

from it is the history of Buddhist worship in non-Brahmanical society. Those records also refer to non-Brahman populations and their religious life.

With the help of Buddhist texts from outside Kerala, Mahayana Buddhism and its later tantric tradition can be read into Kerala's temple inscriptions and literary works.The core argument put forward by this study is that the Tantric and Vajrayana tradition, which emerged from the religious world of Mahayana Buddhism, is found in early medieval inscriptions and literary works, and continues in *kaḷameḻuttŭ*. The nature of the *maithuna* and ferocious deities, the prominence of *pañca-makāras* in rituals, the importance of female priestess, hybrid Sanskrit *mantras* and religious healing, all these show that *kaḷameḻuttŭ* is related to the *maṇḍala* worship of Tantric Buddhism. This study claims that this Tantric Buddhist *maṇḍala* worship was Brahmanised and transformed into Saiva forms in the late medieval period. We can see that Bhagavati, Ayyappan, Cāttaṉ and Naga changed into Saiva and Puranic forms in the late medieval period. Bhagavati was transformed into Bhadrakali, and Ayyappan and Cāttaṉ became incarnations of Siva. Nagam worship became a Puranic form containing the Mahabharata legends. An important change that took place when *kaḷameḻuttŭ* was Brahmanised was that sex rituals became symbolised. Another important activity of Brahmanisation is the attempt to eliminate the priesthood of female priests from the religious world.

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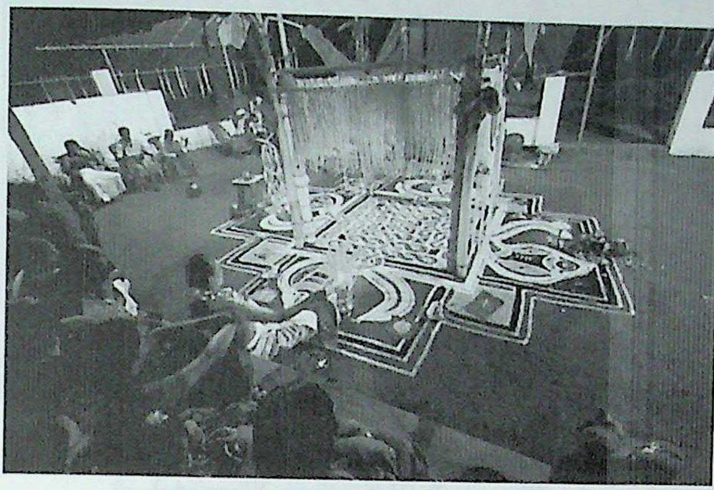


Fig. 1 Priest worships Nāga deity (Malappuram)

Source: Photograph ©Vijesh Ariyallur 2013

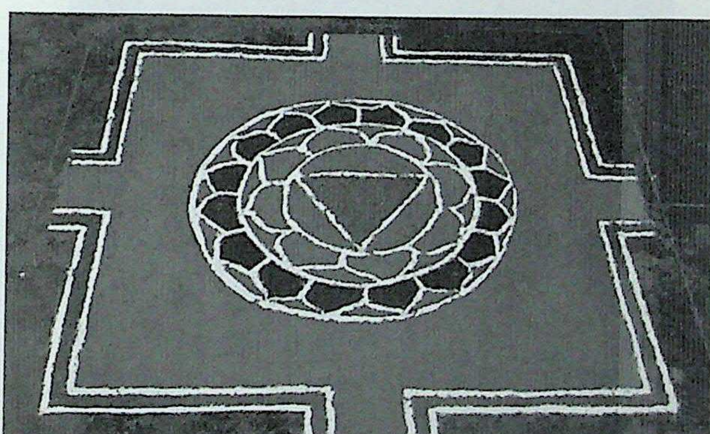


Fig. 2 Mātangiyantram 9 (Kazarkode)

Source: Photograph©Sajith

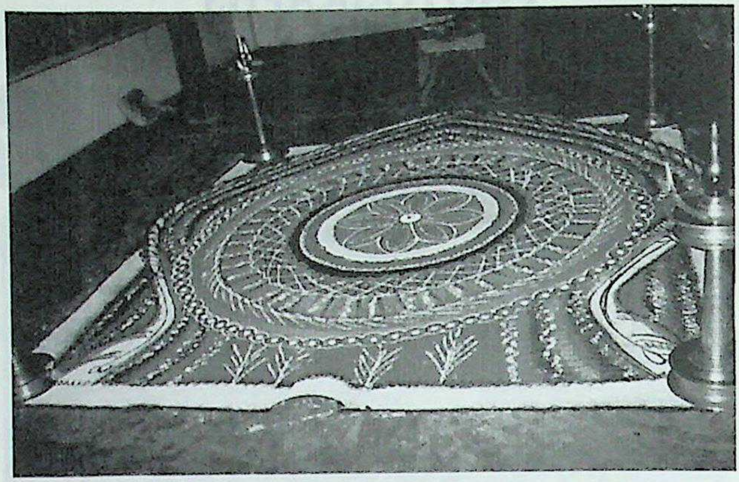


Fig. 3. Maithuna form of Aṣṭadaḷapatmam (Bhagavati), (Valliyurkavu, Wayanadu)

Source: Photograph©Shibi K. 2008

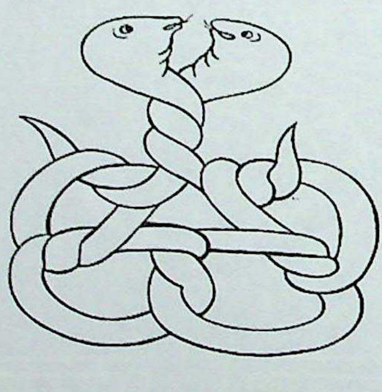


Fig. 4. Maithuna form of Nāgam

Source: Sketch by Shibi K. based on Line Sketch by Sankara Kurup (Late), Malappuram, 1960s

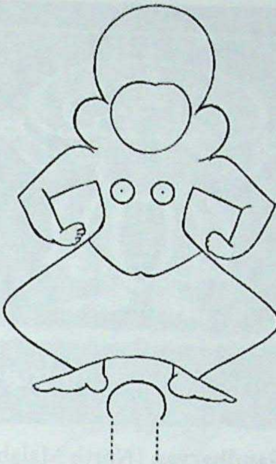


Fig. 5 Image of Phallus in the navel part of Bhagavati
Source: Sketch by Shibi K. based on Line Sketch by Sankara Kurup (Late), Malappuram, 1960s

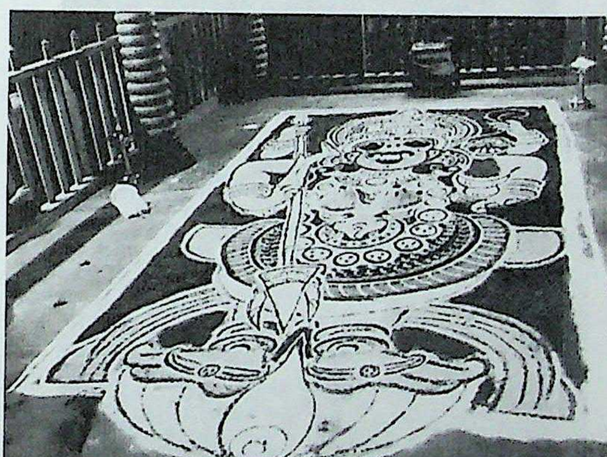


Fig. 6 Ferocious form of Bhagavati (Puthiyakavu, Kannur)
Source: Photograph © Shibi K. 2013

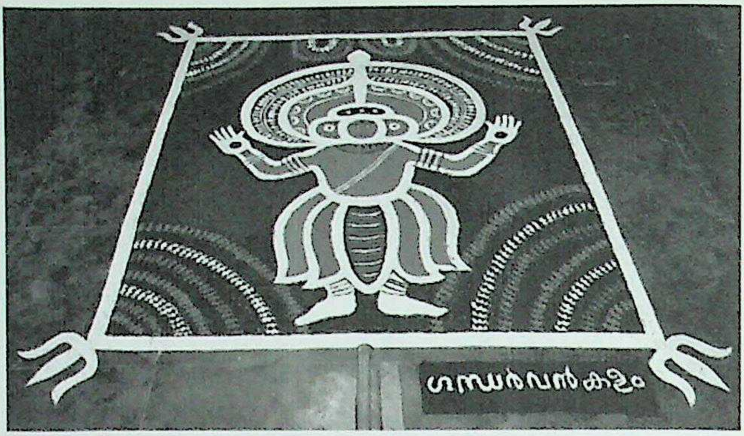


Fig. 7 Gandharvan (North Malabar, 21s)

Source: Photograph© Sajith 2012

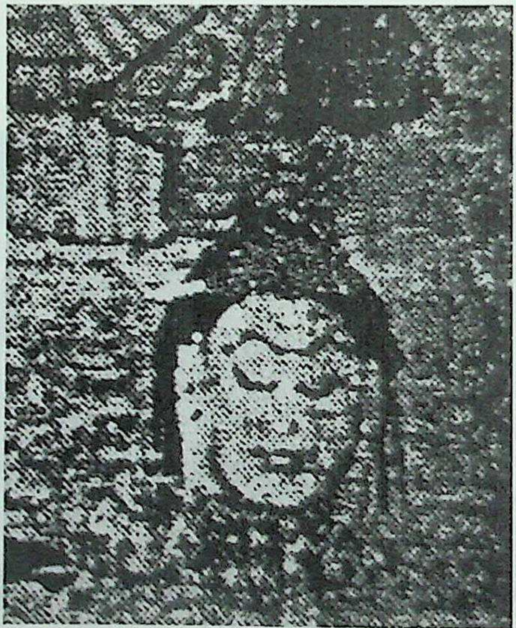


Fig. 8 Mārīcī holding the Human head



Fig. 9 Bagavati in Kaḷameḷuttu (South Malabar, 21st c)
Source: Sketch by Anupama M.

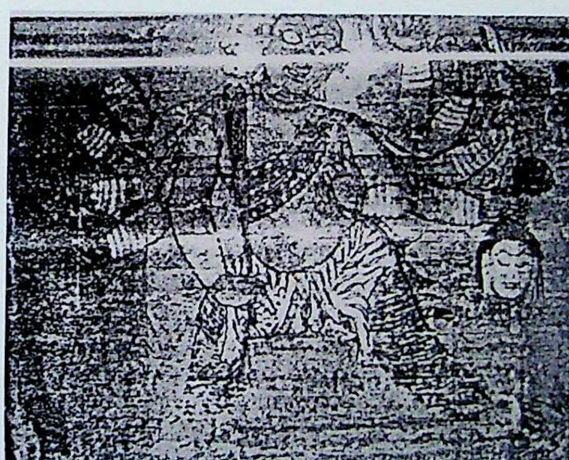


Fig. 10 Mārīcī in Buddhist Maṇḍala (Nepal, AD 1071)
Source: D. C. Bhattacharya, 1978. Pl. 6

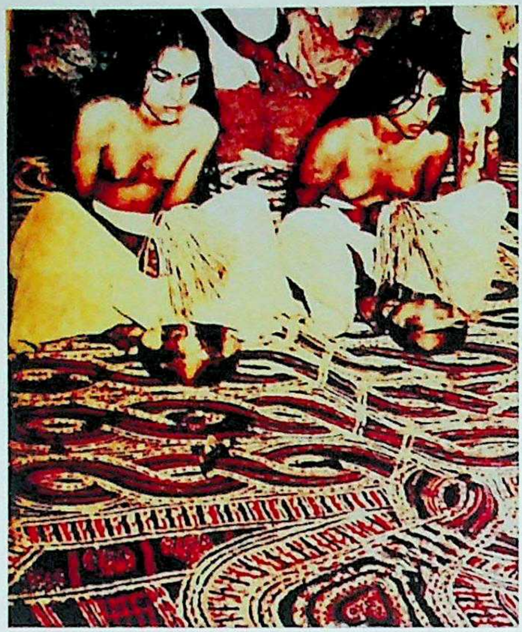


Fig. 11 Nāgakanyas sitting in the Kaḷam
Source: The Mathrubhumi Weekly, Book 30, Sep. 7, 1952



Fig. 12 Female priest making the Nāga deity0
(Koṭtur Nagattanakavu, Wayanadu)
Source: Photograph © Shibi K. 2013



Fig. 13 Maithuna form of Nāga's kaḷam (Malappuram)

Source: Photograph©Vijesh Ariyallur 2013



Fig. 14. Ferocious form of Ayyappan (Niramkaitakkotta, Vallikunnu)

Source: Photograph© Shibi K. 2013



Fig. 15 Maithuna form of Bhagavati and Nampiāttu Gōpalan (Malabar)

Source: Babu Mundekkadu, 2000



Fig. 16 Vajrayana dancer (Nepal, AD 1730)

Manuscripts Opaque watercolor and ink on paper

Source: Los Angeles County Museum of Art

https://ne.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E0%A4%9A%E0%A4%B-F%E0%A4%A4%E0%A5%8D%E0%A4%B0:Manual_for_Ritual_Dances_LAC-MA_M.82.169.18.1-.18_%2810_of_35%29.jpg

Pratapaditya Pal, Art of Nepal, California: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1985, p. 168



Fig. 17 Vairajātan (North Malabar)
Source: Photograph © Shibi K. 2015



Fig. 18 Cattan Kalam (Thrissur)
Source: Photograph © Santhosh E .2015



Fig. 19 Maithuna images in Buddhist Maṇḍala-Cakrasamvara and Vajravarāhī (Central Tibet, 1450–1500)

Source: Guy, John. "Arts of the Greater Himalayas: Kashmir, Tibet, and Nepal." In Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000-http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/grhm/hd_grhm.htm (May 2021)



Fig. 20 Buddhist Monks making Maṇḍala

Source: Cover Photograph, Daniel Cozort, The Sand Mandala of Vajrabhairava, Snow Lion Publications, 1995.



Fig. 21 Vairocana with white colour
(Tibet, late 13th–early 14th century)
Distemper on wood
Source: https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/39486

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From Tantric Buddhist antecedents to the configuration of the Brahmanical Pantheon

Shibi K.

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KC HR

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